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**Xenophon's Failed Imperialists: The Question of Empire in the  
*Hellenica***

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**Xenophon's Failed Imperialists: The Question of Empire in the  
*Hellenica***

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To Grant and Cynthia Witherspoon.

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## Abstract

### **Xenophon's Failed Imperialists: The Question of Empire in the *Hellenica***

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In Xenophon's *Hellenica*, or "Greek Affairs" from 404-362 BCE, both empire and its absence entail characteristic advantages and disadvantages. An international arrangement without empire is necessarily one of empire-seekers; and the quest for empire is, while impressive, also a risky and destabilizing enterprise. Xenophon illuminates these aspects of empire in the *Hellenica* by drawing our attention to the rise and fall of three empire-seekers, thereby revealing the considerable advantages that such human beings bring with them to political life. These advantages consist, above all, in dependable order, foresight regarding future contingencies, and the capacity on the part of rulers to anticipate such contingencies. By the same token, Xenophon reveals what political life lacks when empire is absent in the international sphere: A crucial cause of Greece's confusion and disorder is the absence of any single man or city capable of imposing stable rule through empire. More specifically, however, Xenophon depicts surpassingly capable potential rulers—most notably, Alcibiades, Thrasybulus, and Jason of Pherai—coming to premature ruin. One of the core questions of the *Hellenica*, then, concerns why all of Greece's empire-seekers fail in their ambitions, as well as how they achieve their successes initially. Is it by the "science of empire," evinced most clearly by Cyrus the Great, the main character of Xenophon's historical novel, *The Education of Cyrus*? Or do chance, or providential deities, play a greater role in the initial successes, as well as in the ultimate failures, of Xenophon's failed imperialists than we might at first realize?

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## I. Introduction

“When we reflect on the fame of Thebes and Argos, of Sparta and Athens, we can scarcely persuade ourselves that so many immortal republics of ancient Greece were lost in a single province of the Roman Empire.”

-Edward Gibbon

After several decades of global hegemony, the United States of America has begun seriously to reconsider its geopolitical role and purpose. Should America strive to retain its position as superpower, as some would advocate?<sup>1</sup> Or, in the words of a former Obama Administration advisor, should it craft a new position for itself, relinquishing its former quasi-imperial status and seeking rather to “lead from behind”?<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the urgency of this question for Americans of the twenty-first century, the more fundamental question of empire—what are its advantages and disadvantages, both for the ruler and for the ruled?—is by no means a new one for the United States. Beginning with Alexander Hamilton and his Anti-Federalist opponents, American statesmen have kindled a robust debate over the merits of imperialism—a debate which continues today, as anti-colonialists, neoconservatives, liberal internationalists, and (most recently) *conservative* internationalists question whether the United States and the nations of the world benefit from a superpower capable of projecting unmatched force, for good or for ill, in the international arena.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Charles Krauthammer, “Decline is a Choice,” *The Weekly Standard*, October 19, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ryan Lizza, “The Consequentialist,” *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2011. For a critical account of Obama’s view, see Herbert London, *Leading from Behind* (New York: Liberty Island Media, 2017), and Charles Krauthammer, “The Obama Doctrine: Leading from Behind,” *The Washington Post*, April 28, 2011.

Yet while there is, and has been, no shortage of defenders and partisans in this regard, can we point to a political thinker—classical or contemporary—whose work brings to light the best *and* the worst of what empire and those who seek it have to offer? It is the contention of the present study that Xenophon's *Hellenica* contains just such an argument. For Xenophon, both empire and its absence entail characteristic advantages and disadvantages. An international arrangement without *empire* is necessarily one of empire-seekers. And the quest for empire is, while impressive, also a risky and destabilizing enterprise. To this end, Xenophon examines in the *Hellenica* the rise and fall of three empire-seekers, so as to illuminate the considerable advantages that such human beings bring with them to political life. These advantages consist, perhaps above all, in dependable order, foresight regarding future contingencies, and the capacity on the part of rulers to anticipate such contingencies. By the same token, Xenophon reveals what political life lacks when empire is absent from the international sphere. He thereby invites us to think through, on the basis of the struggle between freedom and empire that takes place in the *Hellenica*, whether or not the success of Greece's three great failed empire-seekers—Alcibiades, Thrasybulus, and Jason of Pherai—would have been good for “Greek Affairs,” generally.

Now commentators have long agreed that Xenophon intended the *Hellenica* to continue Thucydides' *War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, a work long regarded as the basis of modern international relations theory, and consequently, respected by political scientists and policymakers, alike. Anyone who turns to the *Hellenica* expecting Thucydides will be sorely disappointed, however. Thucydides' work comes to light as a

*tour de force* of poetic unity; its themes—justice, necessity, and the conflict between Athens and Sparta as the fundamental alternatives—are vivid and pronounced, and emerge effortlessly from the subject on which Thucydides concentrates all of his attention: the Peloponnesian War, the greatest war, whose examination discloses the permanent truth and therefore remains a “possession for all times.”<sup>3</sup>

By vivid contrast, the *Hellenica*’s sole unifying theme would seem to be that it *has* no unifying theme—which Xenophon suggests by means of his work’s nebulous title: literally, “Greek Affairs” or “Greek Things.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, oceans of ink have been spilt by scholars trying to clear up the *Hellenica*’s manifest “strangeness,”<sup>5</sup> the vast<sup>6</sup> majority of commentators contending that the *Hellenica* consists of multiple and distinct parts which should be studied as distinct works in themselves.<sup>7</sup> On this basis, these scholars further contend that the *Hellenica* contains no discernable unifying purpose or teaching.

Vivienne Grey, today’s most notable *Hellenica* scholar in the field of history, says the *Hellenica* “begins *in media res* as a continuation of Thucydides’ unfinished history,” and asserts that it is simply a “fact” that the *Hellenica* continues Thucydides’ work.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>3</sup> Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*, 1.22.4.

<sup>4</sup> The title is a plural substantive adjective. I have used E.C. Marchant’s Oxford Clarendon edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), as well as the Loeb edition, Carleton L. Brownson, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950). I have also made frequent use of Robert B. Strassler’s “Landmark” translation—particularly, of this edition’s chronology and maps (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009). Unless otherwise noted, all references to dates in terms of “BCE” are based on the “Landmark” edition.

<sup>5</sup> Eduard Schwartz 1889 “Quellenuntersuchungen zur griechischen Geschichte.” *Reinshes Museum* 44 (1889): 184-185. Cited by W.E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 100.

<sup>6</sup> As I will discuss briefly near the end of the present chapter, there are less than ten scholars, out of the hundred who have written on the *Hellenica*, who read the work as a single, unified work.

<sup>7</sup> See Henry, *Greek Historical Writing*, for the most comprehensive survey of this view.

<sup>8</sup> Vivienne Grey, *The Character of Xenophon’s Hellenica* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1989) 1. For the same view, see also David Thomas, “Introduction” to the Landmark *Hellenica*, xxx-xxxiv.

may very well be the case; yet, if true, a whole host of implications would follow from it. To take just one: If Xenophon intended the *Hellenica* and the *Peloponnesian War* to form a single work, does this mean that Xenophon agreed with Thucydides about, say, the causes of the Peloponnesian War, and the purpose of historical writing, in general? The *Hellenica*, for its part, supplies us with no explicit answers to these questions, and so to figure out if Xenophon supplies us with answers, we must look within the text itself for clues. The question of continuation leads, in turn, naturally to the question of intention.

Grey, however, further obscures the difficulty of discerning Xenophon's intention by declaring that "the tradition in which Xenophon is assumed to be writing is the tradition of Thucydides."<sup>9</sup> No doubt, there is something to this. Like Thucydides' work, the *Hellenica* is written in prose, and contains both narrative and speeches. The question of what continuation *is* remains, however, since the fact alone that two works share a subject and style by no means implies that the works' authors had the same purpose in writing—or, for that matter, the same teaching about their subject to convey. On this score, David Thomas postulates: "Presumably because he saw himself as continuing Thucydides, Xenophon did not follow his predecessors and provide a preface setting out the scope and methods of his work. It seems that he thought that this would be obvious."<sup>10</sup>

This possibility leads us directly to a third puzzle: Assuming Xenophon *did* write with the same purpose as Thucydides, did he therefore intend for Thucydides' methodology to apply to the entire *Hellenica*, or only to the subject that Thucydides, himself, explicitly

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<sup>9</sup> Grey, *Character*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> David Thomas, "Introduction," xxx.

says he will “write together”: The War between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians? As Grey herself points out: “Admittedly, the greater part of [the *Hellenica*] concerned events subsequent to [the Peloponnesian] war.”<sup>11</sup> But *why*? If Xenophon had the same purpose as Thucydides, why would he spend more than two thirds of the “continuation” on a subject other than Thucydides’ own? This question, and the related question of the interrelation of the two “parts,” must be answered satisfactorily if the “continuation” quandary is to be resolved. If Xenophon really intended for the *Hellenica* to serve this purpose of continuing Thucydides’ work, *and nothing more*, then how hard would it have been for him to insert a single line into his seven-volume tome saying precisely this—and, in so doing, to clear up any question of the relation between the *Hellenica* and *The Peloponnesian War*?

One might respond that if Xenophon wished for the end of Thucydides’ work to blend seamlessly into his own work, with the result that the two could be read as a single work, then any statement on Xenophon’s part would have interrupted the work’s natural flow.<sup>12</sup> This answer is vulnerable to an obvious counter-question, namely: If Xenophon wished to create the illusion of continuity between his work and Thucydides’, why provide his work with a title of its own: *Hellenica*? Moreover, why chronicle “Greek Affairs” from the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BCE) until 362 BCE—forty-two *additional* years—given that Thucydides’ own stated intention was to “write together,” not Greek Affairs

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<sup>11</sup> Grey, *Character*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Another possible response is that Xenophon did discuss the *Hellenica*’s relation to Thucydides, albeit in an introduction to the *Hellenica* which has been lost; this is the “lacuna” hypothesis, which McLaren discredited in his essay, “A Supposed Lacuna at the Beginning of Xenophon’s *Hellenica*,” *American Journal of Philology* 100 (1979): 228-238. See also Grey, *Character*, 197 n.2: “There is no evidence for a missing preface or lacuna.”

404-362 BCE, but the twenty-seven year “war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians”?

It is to Grey’s credit that she raises this objection and takes it seriously. Yet her answer leaves us puzzled. After acknowledging that “the problem of the nature of the continuation remains unsolved,”<sup>13</sup> Grey begins to separate the *Hellenica* into two parts: (1) “the continuation” and (2) “the rest of the work”—as if, for interpretive reasons, the work must be read as if it were two rather than one.<sup>14</sup> In so doing, she anticipates the judgement of Tuplin, who, like Grey, seeks to discern in the *Hellenica* a serious teaching, yet who insists nonetheless on maintaining the consensus view that the *Hellenica* lacks a principles of unity: “To be blunt, the two sections, which in the first instances must be regarded as to all extents and purposes separate works, have to be studied separately and in isolation before there can be any question of a global judgement of *Hellenica*.”<sup>15</sup>

The “disunity” thesis maintained by Grey, Thomas, and Tuplin seems to have originated in a 1836 philological essay by Karl Wilhelm Krüger, of which W.P. Henry provides the following helpful summary.<sup>16</sup> Krüger argues that Xenophon, having as a young man inherited Thucydides’ notes, fashioned these into what has come down to us as the first two books of the *Hellenica*, which end with the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants. These, Xenophon published as Thucydides’ works, even though he himself had written the

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<sup>13</sup> *Character*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Character*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Tuplin, *The Failings of Empire* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Wilhelm Krüger, “Prüfung der Niebuhrschen Ansicht über Xenophons Hellenika,” *Historisch-philologische Studien* 1, Berlin (1836). Henry discusses this work at length in Chapter One of *Greek Historical Writing* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1966).

addition touching on the Thirty. As for the glaringly-obvious question of why Xenophon then proceeded to publish *this* writing, together with the five books that constitute the rest of the *Hellenica*—as if the seven books constituted a single whole—Krüger spins the following (to repeat, *utterly conjectural*) yarn. After finishing the first two books, Xenophon left for his famous Anabasis; and as a result, he did not get around to the chronicling the post Thirty-Tyrants affairs of Greece until he retired as an old man. Once finished with these chronicles, however, instead of simply publishing the chronicles as a separate work—presumably, the most rational alternative—he decided instead to strap them together with the Thucydides notes he had inherited as a young man, as well as the account of the Thirty, and then to publish all of them as a whole--the *Hellenica*!

Commentators have almost unanimously shared Krüger's presupposition that, in making sense of the *Hellenica*, the scholar's aim should not be to discover what Xenophon might have to teach about politics and human affairs, but rather, to discover the historical circumstances of its composition.<sup>17</sup> A pervasive logical flaw consequently pervades many of these otherwise helpful works of scholarship, namely, The *Hellenica* could not have a unified teaching, because it obviously consists of distinct parts; and the *Hellenica* must consist of distinct parts, since it obviously has no unified teaching. Yet the initial question of unity necessarily determines whether one approaches the *Hellenica* with an open mind. Hence, according to a few scholars who maintain the disunity thesis,

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<sup>17</sup> To this end, Grey probably has scholars like Krüger in mind when she states that "the modern explanations of why Thucydides took the story of the Peloponnesian War further than Thucydides envisaged are really no better than" "the explanation put forward by the ancient commentator, Dionysius of Halicarnassus," *Character*, 3.

Xenophon's lack of unified purpose in composing the *Hellenica* renders the work's contents rather trivial, at least in comparison with the content of Thucydides' work.<sup>18</sup> Renowned classical scholars such as Cawkwell and Warner, for example, demote the *Hellenica* to the status of "memoirs"<sup>19</sup>—i.e., reflections and observations about his own life, lacking any deeper theoretical and pedagogical purpose. Hence, we read in W.P. Henry's classic monograph that *the* "problem" of the *Hellenica* is "historiographical," i.e., that the problem of understanding the *Hellenica* concerns primarily "the circumstances under which an account of history is written,"<sup>20</sup> rather than discerning what Xenophon intends to teach us.

Nevertheless, that Xenophon *does* intend to teach something important is argued in a few *Hellenica* studies which take seriously the possibility that Xenophon wrote the *Hellenica* with a deeper logic and purpose.<sup>21</sup> These studies testify to a renewed interest in the political thought of Xenophon which has emerged in the last half-century.<sup>22</sup> Gerald

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<sup>18</sup> For a critical summary of this scholarly position, see Higgins, *Xenophon*, 98-100.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Tuplin summarizes the "memoirs" theory—with which he himself disagrees—as follows: "The *Hellenica* falls into two parts (1.1.1-2.3.10; 2.3.11-7.5.27), of which the second was composed in the 350s, the first much earlier (though after Xenophon had left Athens). The second part should be regarded as Memoirs (a record of Xenophon's direct experience or his experience 'by hearsay' heavily informed by the Peloponnesian bias of his post-394 life-style) not History; a work, therefore, characterized by partiality (in both senses) and, despite the complimentary statement that the vital historical period 404-362 B.C. would, without Xenophon hardly seem worth the knowing, deserving of the large fall in its reputation stimulated by *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*. The first part, though a conscious continuation of Thucydides and Thucydidean in certain ways, is also essentially Memoirs not History." This summary is to be found in Tuplin, "Review of *The Penguin Hellenica*," *The Classical Review* 30, No. 1 (1980): 6. For stylistic and grammatical reasons, I have altered the passage slightly in my quotation of it. See also *A History of My Times*, translated by Rex Warner and with an introduction by G. Cawkwell, New York: Penguin, 1978.

<sup>20</sup> *Greek Historians*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> See Ariel Helfer, "Socrates' Political Legacy," (paper presented at the 2015 Midwest Political Science Association conference, Chicago, IL); Gerald Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta* (Leiden: Brill, 1987); Christopher Tuplin, *Failings*; Leo Strauss, "Greek Historians," *Review of Metaphysics* (1968).

<sup>22</sup> Eric Buzzetti, "New Developments in Xenophon Studies," *Interpretation* 30, 2, 2003 157-178.



Proietti's monograph, *Xenophon's Sparta*, argues persuasively that the *Hellenica* contains a thematic, coherent, sustained analysis of the Spartan regime most broadly understood: how that regime operates within the borders of Sparta, as well as the ways it shapes those nurtured by it. Accordingly, Proietti examines the imperialistic ambitions evinced by Sparta after the Peloponnesian War; he discerns, among other fascinating themes, a muted critique of Sparta by Xenophon.<sup>23</sup>

More important for our present purposes, however, Proietti articulates in general terms the methodology that I follow in the present study: "The approach that seems most natural [in trying to understand the *Hellenica*] is to begin by examining the parts and looking to see how those parts might combine to form a unified whole."<sup>24</sup> In considering the question of the *Hellenica*'s structure with an open mind—i.e., without having decided at the outset that it *lacks* a coherent structure—we discover, through attentive reading, that the themes of empire and empire-seeking are prominent ones. For in Xenophon's account, the Greeks' abiding concern with empire gives rise to the seemingly incomprehensible chaos, the endless reversals and vicissitudes that constitute "Greek Affairs" from 411 to 362 BCE. Xenophon's account shows the cities of Greece encountering frustration at every turn as they form and break countless alliances, seek and lose regional hegemony, and jostle unsuccessfully among themselves for empire over all of Greece. As Higgins aptly notes, the *Hellenica* "is a history of repeated attempts at empire and the continual

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<sup>23</sup> In so doing, Proietti "refutes the" almost universally accepted "charge that Xenophon was biased in favor of Sparta." David Bolotin, "Considering Sparta and Reconsidering Xenophon," *The Review of Politics* 51, 2 (1989): 303.

<sup>24</sup> *Xenophon's Sparta*, xxi.

subversion of independence and order itself throughout the Greek world.”<sup>25</sup> To compare the *Hellenica* to our own historical context, one could say that overturning and replacing precisely the political world which Xenophon depicts in his *Hellenica*--a world characterized by endless instability, and composed of “wretched nurseries of unceasing discord”<sup>26</sup>--was the express purpose of those great philosophers and philosophic statesmen who conceived, initiated, and founded modern politics.

Yet even in comparison with Xenophon’s own political writings, the chaos and frustration which the *Hellenica* depicts stand in particularly vivid contrast with that depicted in the *Education of Cyrus*. In *that* text, the effortlessness and skill with which Cyrus the Great achieves the very pinnacle of political power, and imposes order on the lands he rules, persuades us that “ruling human beings...with science” *is* indeed possible, as Xenophon asserts in that work’s introduction.<sup>27</sup> Everything Cyrus the imperialist *par excellence* touches seemingly turns to gold.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, the *Hellenica* appears to be rhetorically calculated to make us question the very possibility of a science of rule or empire (*arxē*), which the *Education* persuaded us to be possible. The observation with which Xenophon opens the *Education*, that “human beings unite against none more than

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<sup>25</sup> Higgins, *Xenophon*, 103-104.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Hamilton, in *The Federalist* #9.

<sup>27</sup> *The Education of Cyrus* 1.1.3. For an illuminating discussion of Cyrus’ “science of empire,” see W. R. Newell, “Tyranny and the ‘Science of Ruling’ in Xenophon’s *Education of Cyrus*,” *The Journal of Politics* 45, 4 (1983): 889-906.

<sup>28</sup> One might object that the last chapter of the *Education* undercuts my characterization of the work here. While there is some truth to this objection, it is important not to lose the forest for the trees. The critique of Cyrus that Xenophon spells out in the last chapter does show that Cyrus’ political gains were short-lived after his death. As a whole, however, the *Education* depicts an immensely successful imperialist and gives the impression that such empire is possible and in important respects desirable. To explain Xenophon’s critique of empire in the *Education* adequately, would not one also need to explain why Xenophon felt the need to present that critique as powerful praise of Cyrus as a successful empire-seeker?

against those whom they perceive attempting to rule them,”<sup>29</sup> is thereby manifestly born out in the *Hellenica* as a whole. As Xenophon asserts at his works conclusion, having described the climactic inter-Greek battle of Mantinea, “neither side was found to be any better off, as regards either additional territory, or city, or empire (*arxē*), than before the battle came to be; but *even more* (*heti pleiōn*) confusion and disorder (*akrisia de kai taraxē*) obtained in Greece after the battle than before” (7.5.27). Xenophon thus further implies that even before Mantinea’s chaotic outcome, all of Greece existed in a condition of “confusion and disorder.”

As I argue, Xenophon shows that a crucial cause of Greece’s confusion and disorder is the absence of any single man or city capable of imposing stable rule or empire. Every imperial enterprise and grand political ambition Xenophon describes ends up frustrated; impressive and admirable men *almost* succeed in their ambitions, but in the end, fail utterly. More specifically, Xenophon depicts surpassingly capable potential rulers—most notably, Alcibiades, Thrasyboulos, and Jason of Pherai—coming to premature ruin as a result of what would seem to be incalculable chance. Thus, in stark contrast with Xenophon’s fictional Cyrus the Great, everything these Greeks touch in the *Hellenica* seemingly turns to lead.

One of the great puzzles of the *Hellenica*, then, is why all of Greece’s empire-seekers fail in their ambitions. Each of the three failures I examine brings to light features of the ambition for empire *as such*. Of the three, Xenophon shows Jason of Pherai to be

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<sup>29</sup> *Education* 1.1.2

particularly aware of the extent to which chance pervades political affairs; it is with considerable dramatic irony that we read, shortly before his abrupt downfall, Jason's statement that "the god, it seems, takes joy (*xairei*) in frequently making the great small, and the small, great" (6.4.24). Jason, perhaps the *Hellenica*'s most promising empire-seeker (Xenophon proclaims him "the greatest man of his [time]" [6.4.28]), turns out also to be its most skeptical as regards man's capacity to guarantee political success through the pursuit of empire. For Jason exhibits an intuitive awareness of the nature of political life as the *Hellenica* depicts it—that is, an awareness of the fragility of human power in the face of chance. Both Alcibiades and Thrasybulus confirm the truth of Jason's intuition through the ends they meet; for both men, after incredible successes, come to ruin through seemingly incalculable chance. However, in Xenophon's depiction, neither of these men exhibits Jason's awareness of the fragility of human undertakings. Alcibiades—who is blamed by the Athenians for impiety, and whom many of the Athenians "prophesize" will ruin both himself and the city (1.4.12)—evinces great confidence in purely-human power. And Thrasybulus, by contrast, puts enormous trust in the Olympian gods, whom he believes fight alongside those who are just. And while Thrasybulus proves to be correct as regards his restoration of the Athenian democracy, he proves to be incorrect as regards his gambit for a new Athenian empire.

Thus, in drawing our attention to the failures of Alcibiades, Thrasybulus, and Jason, Xenophon challenges us to uncover the causes by which these men in particular failed to achieve the aims they pursued—aims which Xenophon causes us to anticipate they will achieve. Accordingly, that even the *Hellenica*'s most successful and promising empire-

seekers come to ruin through chance events—events which neither they nor we (Xenophon’s readers) could reasonably have foreseen—induces us to examine whether these events are, in fact, chance ones. More specifically, it induces us to investigate Xenophon’s own assertion that “many other Greek affairs (*hellenica*) as well as barbarian affairs [show] that (*hōs*) the gods are unconcerned neither (*houte*) with impious things (*asebountōn*) nor (*houte*) with those who do unholy things” (*tōn anosia poiountōn* 5.4.1).<sup>30</sup> By positing that “Greek affairs” were steered by providential gods—that is, gods concerned with “impious things” and “those who do unholy things”—Xenophon prompts us to investigate his description of the rise and fall of those human figures that seem to steer “Greek affairs” most decisively. By virtue of what, precisely, did these achieve their successes initially? Was it by the “science of empire” that Cyrus the Great, a fictitious character, most clearly displays? Or did chance—or providential gods—play a greater role in their initial successes than we might at first realize? To answer these questions, let us turn now to Alcibiades, Xenophon’s first great failed imperialist.

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<sup>30</sup> Xenophon’s use of the double negative in this passage makes translating it rather awkward. Its sense would seem to be that many “Greek affairs” show that the gods *are* concerned with impious things and with those who do unholy things. Logically, however, the statement signifies only that the gods do *not* care about things that are *not* unholy and *not* impious. And a double-negative in a statement does not necessarily make that statement positive.

## II. Alcibiades

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Alcibiades' competence in military and political affairs sets him apart from the considerable lineup of characters Xenophon introduces us to in the *Hellenica*'s early "Athenian passages."<sup>31</sup> We consequently anticipate that Alcibiades will duly succeed in "salvag[ing] the former power" of the Athenian empire (1.4.20)—a goal which the Athenians, having pronounced Alcibiades "most capable" (*kratistos* 1.4.13), assigned him. Xenophon thereby fills us with expectations of a profoundly new political landscape in Greece, one dominated by an Alcibiadean empire capable of expanding well beyond Greece itself.

Yet Xenophon also complicates matters for us by offering no explicit guidance for understanding Alcibiades' role in Greek Affairs. He praises Alcibiades only in a "subdued" way,<sup>32</sup> nowhere calling attention to Alcibiades' strengths and weaknesses in his own name,<sup>33</sup> choosing instead merely to present Alcibiades' deeds, and a few of his speeches, and to let readers draw conclusions for themselves as to whether they are good or bad. As we shall see, Xenophon's reticence in this regard is justified by the complicated role played

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<sup>31</sup> Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*. Both Strauss and Proietti note the dominant role which Xenophon assigns to Alcibiades in the *Hellenica*'s early chapters. Strauss suggests that, with Alcibiades as its ruler, Athens might have defeated Lysander and avoided its final defeat by the Spartans. By extension, then, he suggests that the fate of the Athenian empire, together with the fate of Greek Affairs as a whole, was bound up with the man, Alcibiades. Proietti, accordingly, sees in Xenophon's account of Alcibiades "a crucial part of the thematic development in the Athenian passages of Books I-II." See "Greek Historians" 664-665; *Xenophon's Sparta* 109.

<sup>32</sup> "Greek Historians," 664.

<sup>33</sup> Xenophon does with other notable characters in the *Hellenica*: Theramenes (2.3.56); Jason of Pherai (6.4.28); Teleutias (5.1.3-4); Iphicrates (6.2.27-32, esp. 32).

by Alcibiades in events leading up to Athens' eventual defeat and capitulation to Sparta. Accordingly, in his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon explicitly refuses to defend Alcibiades—if Alcibiades “harmed [Athens] in some way” (1.2.12-13).<sup>34</sup> Refusing to defend, of course, is not the same as to *condemning*. The condition that Xenophon adds to his statement here thus prompts us to investigate his depiction of Alcibiades in the *Hellenica*. In this depiction, Xenophon leads us to the following conclusion. Either Alcibiades' premature ruin reveals the unfathomable degree to which human affairs are governed by chance, i.e., by necessities that are beyond our ability to foresee and anticipate; or it suggests that Alcibiades fell, not as a result of blind necessities which we could not reasonably expect him to have foreseen, but rather, through his impious conduct towards the gods.

## 2. THE *HELLENICA*'S CHAOTIC OPENING

Xenophon opens the *Hellenica* with a description of events taking place several days after the events described by Thucydides at the very end of the *Peloponnesian War*, in 411 BCE. Thucydides ends his narrative with Athens in dire straits. With their Sicilian expedition destroyed, the Persians liberally funding their Spartan nemeses, and their fleet under the general Thymochares recently defeated at Eretria (directly off Athens' northern shore), the Athenians, by Thucydides' account, look to be on their very last legs. On this score, at least, the *Hellenica*'s opening is hardly more encouraging. In its very first

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<sup>34</sup> See Helfer, “Socratic Characters,” 5-6.

sentence, the Athenians under the same Thymochares (now in the Hellespont) are said to lose a naval battle to the Spartans.

Yet the general thrust of the *Hellenica*'s beginning differs crucially from that of Thucydides' ending. Its opening pages describe a series of chaotic, inconclusive skirmishes fought between the Athenians and the Spartans in the Hellespont—followed immediately by the spectacular entrance of Alcibiades, who quickly and effortlessly brings order to the confusion. By juxtaposing these initial events with Alcibiades' subsequent brilliant campaigns, Xenophon emphasizes an aspect of Alcibiades which Thucydides leaves in the background, namely Alcibiades' capacity for bringing order where others have wrought disorder.

The first battle Xenophon describes in detail, between the Spartans and Athenians at a place in the Hellespont called Abydos, is preceded by a series of awkward mishaps and reversals which give the impression that Greek Affairs are generally in a state of confusion. Dorieus, a Spartan general, sails into the Hellespont with a small fleet, and is quickly spotted by an Athenian lookout. Dorieus, who is taken utterly by surprise by the Athenians, flees, and the Athenians promptly give chase. Dorieus having evaded the Athenians, he then tries to beach his triremes at a place called Rhoiteion. Here, however, the Athenians catch up with him, and the two sides fight an inconclusive skirmish, at the end of which (reports Xenophon) "the Athenians accomplished nothing" (1.1.3). At this point, with the two sides stalemated, Xenophon mentions that a Spartan general named Mindarus catches sight of the ensuing battle and decides to try to rescue his comrade, Dorieus. This, in turn,



prompts the Athenians to attack Mindarus, as well as Dorieus: “the Athenians, fighting from morning till evening, won in some places and lost in others” (1.1.5).

This series of back-and-forth, inconclusive confrontations between the Spartans and Athenians indicates that none of the combatants has any discernible strategy or plan of action. Rather, conflicts are triggered in the manner of stimulus-response: (1) Dorieus sails into Hellespont; (2) the Athenians notice him and chase him; (3) he flees to Rhoiteion and tries to beach his ships; (4) the Athenians assault him on the beach but fail to accomplish anything; (5) Mindarus happens to notice and tries to pick up Dorieus, (6) he fails; (7) the Athenians now fight with both Mindarus and Dorieus; (8) neither side can budge the other. What is more, the confusion Xenophon here depicts would seem to begin with Dorieus, who initiates the entire series of skirmishes by entering with his force into the Hellespont. Yet Xenophon says nothing about *why* Dorieus enters the Hellespont in the first place. Was he on a mission? Was he fleeing the Athenians? Was he seeking to *engage* the Athenians? We never learn; and nothing in Book Eight of Thucydides’ work gives us any clues.<sup>35</sup> What Xenophon does make clear is that the Athenians, like a dog fetching a ball, automatically pursue Dorieus once he enters their field of vision. Here, again, the Greeks exhibit neither a plan nor foresight. By the looks of it, the Athenians were sitting about idly when Dorieus blindly stumbled into their midst. The Athenians, in turn, pursue Dorieus as a matter of course—yet fail to catch him. Dorieus then tries to beach his ships, but fails to do so

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<sup>35</sup> Dorieus, son of Diagoras, is mentioned by Thucydides twice, at 8.35.1 and 8.84.2. Neither mention gives us any clues as to Dorieus’ mission or goals at the time of the *Hellenica*’s opening, however.

because the Athenians catch him before he finishes. At this point, Mindarus swoops in to rescue Dorieus—yet he fails, as well.

Every one of the attempts that Xenophon describes here fails. As a result, the battle that the two sides end up fighting at Abydos proceeds unevenly, with the Athenians gaining the advantage at some places but losing it at others. As I noted above, Thucydides' account at the end of Book Eight leaves us with the impression that Athens is heading straight for defeat. Yet based on their respective performances at the *Hellenica*'s opening, it is difficult to say with any certainty whether the Athenians or the Spartans are more likely to win at Abydos--and for that matter, how the war, and Greek Affairs generally, are likely to proceed in the rest of the *Hellenica*. Xenophon's report of these events seems rhetorically calculated to highlight confusion and disorder, and to force us to question our ability to predict outcomes.

### **3. ALCIBIADES' ENTRANCE: SHREWDNESS, ENERGY, AND FORESIGHT**

Order is suddenly *imposed* on this confusion, however, with the dramatic entrance of Alcibiades, who, like “a flash of lightening,”<sup>36</sup> rushes onto the scene at Abydos and immediately defeats the Spartans (1.1.5-7). And in the passages that follow, Alcibiades' successes only continue; from here until the beginning of Book Two, “every move Alcibiades makes is a coup.”<sup>37</sup> After crushing the Spartans at Abydos, Alcibiades orders the Athenians to collect money, and—after escaping on horseback in the middle of the

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<sup>36</sup> Strauss, “Greek Historians,” 664; Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Helfer, “Socratic Characters,” 8.

night from Tissaphernes' prison (1.1.10)—destroys a massive Spartan force at the battle of Cyzicus (1.1.16-18). This victory in turn prepares the groundwork for Alcibiades' return to Athens.

Let us briefly consider what, in Xenophon's account, sets Alcibiades apart from his Greek counterparts at the beginning of Book One. After his initial victory at Abydos, Alcibiades makes an announcement to his soldiers in which he threatens with death "anyone who is caught sailing across to the opposite coast" (1.1.15). He does this precisely because he recognizes the need to keep his naval arrangements secret from the Spartans at nearby Cyzicus, whom he plans to attack next.<sup>38</sup> A less foresighted mind, perhaps rendered overconfident by the sweetness of victory, would have missed this detail, thereby jeopardizing the whole enterprise. Alcibiades, by contrast, evidently recognizes that victory at present by no means guarantees victory to come; that prudent measures, such as preventing his men from giving away their position to the Spartans, must be taken in order to ward off surprises. And, as we might expect, Alcibiades' secrecy enables him next to achieve a stunning victory over the Spartan force at Cyzicus. There, Alcibiades' secrecy and daring, combined with astonishingly good luck—heavy rain conceals him as he successfully ambushes the Spartans under Mindarus (1.1.16-18)—result in decisive victory for the Athenians.

After describing the battle, Xenophon dramatically switches scenes, showing us in quick succession two episodes which reveal a considerable disjunction between Persia's

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<sup>38</sup> Strauss, "Greek Historians," 664.

capacity to supply Sparta with funds, and Sparta's capacity to make good use of these funds against Alcibiades. First, we see the Spartan general Hipparchus, having taken over for Mindarus (who was killed in the battle), sending the following pitiful message to Sparta: "Ships gone; Mindarus dead; men starving; nowhere to turn" (*aporiomes* 1.1.23). Xenophon heightens the pathetic character of this episode by noting that Hipparchus' message never even made it to Sparta; it was "intercepted and taken to Athens" (1.1.23). The Spartans are so incompetent as to be unable to get an "S.O.S" message to Sparta; how, we wonder, can they possibly defeat Alcibiades? Second, Xenophon takes us to the camp of the defeated Spartans, where we see the Persian satrap Pharnabazus--the conduit through which Persia is funding Sparta--attempting to prevent the Spartans from losing heart in their war against Athens (1.2.24). Pharnabazus does this by assuring the Spartans that, notwithstanding the outcome of the battle, they have plenty of money from Persia to fall back on (1.1.24).

This scene, which reveals the wealth of the Spartan-Persian alliance, Xenophon dramatically juxtaposes with Alcibiades' frank assessment of the Athenians' dire poverty. In the first speech of the *Hellenica*,<sup>39</sup> Alcibiades announces the situation that the Athenians are in, and proposes a way out: "There is no money (*chrēmata*) with us, yet our enemies have unlimited (*aphthona*) money from the King" (1.1.14). Thus, just as Xenophon drew our attention to Alcibiades' competence by juxtaposing him with Dorieus and Mindarus, now he spotlights Alcibiades' *weakness* by contrasting him with the exceedingly well-

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<sup>39</sup> Strauss, "Greek Historians": "[T]he name Alcibiades is named up to this point (1.1.1-15) twice as often as the name of any other individual" 664. To this end, Xenophon gives the first speech of the *Hellenica* to Alcibiades.

funded Spartans and Persians. However, it is a crucial feature of Alcibiades' competence that he is clear-sighted about his weakness, and the urgent need to remedy it. Alcibiades clearly sees that, while daring and energy have enabled him to best the Spartans so far, he needs money in order to sustain his enterprise into the future.

#### **4. ALCIBIADES AND THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF ATHENIAN EMPIRE**

The *Hellenica*'s opening reveals a Sparta ill-equipped for making good use of Persia's infinite supplies, especially in the face of the all-resourceful enemy, Alcibiades. In revealing the Persians as incompetent "haves," and Alcibiades as a highly competent "have not," that is, by juxtaposing their respective capacities for making use of their possessions, Xenophon reminds us of words he himself spoke to his fellow Greeks while stranded in Persia: "Clearly, all of these good things"—namely, the good things of Persia—belong to those who are most capable" (*tōn kratountōn*).<sup>40</sup> "Those who are most capable," whom Xenophon is referring to at this stage of the *Anabasis*, are of course the "Ten Thousand" Greek mercenaries, whom Cyrus enlisted to overthrow his brother, Artaxerxes. Xenophon in this speech recommends to the Ten Thousand that, once they return to Greece, they should encourage the other Greeks to relieve their "poverty" and to improve their conditions by invading Persia. For the Greeks are "most capable," and the Persians, who are far less capable, possess "all of the good things." Additionally, Xenophon's

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<sup>40</sup> 3.2.26.

juxtaposition of Alcibiades and the Persian-funded Spartans brings to mind a passage from the *Education of Cyrus*:

The trial (*dikē*) was as such: a big boy with a little coat, finding a little boy with a big coat on, took it off him and put his own coat on him, while he put on the other's. So when I tried them, I judged that it was better for them both that each should keep the coat that fitted him.<sup>41</sup>

The last is the initial conclusion drawn by that greatest imperialist depicted by Xenophon, Cyrus the Great. Cyrus founds an empire by taking land and supplies from those less capable, including Lydia, Babylon, and even Media, the country belonging to his very own uncle. Through his account of Alcibiades' exploits, Xenophon invites us to wonder what Alcibiades might accomplish with Persia's "infinite" supplies at his disposal. To be sure, Xenophon by no means announces or even explicitly states in the *Hellenica* his own thoughts regarding a renewed Athenian empire under Alcibiades; he never announces whether Greek affairs would have been improved or worsened by the success of Alcibiades' imperial enterprise. At most, Xenophon induces us at these early stages in the *Hellenica* to consider whether Alcibiades' surpassing military and political talents give him a legitimate claim to rule those whose capacities are inferior, and whether Greece would have been considerably benefitted by an empire under him.

To return to Alcibiades' enterprise, the Athenian victory at Cyzicus in no way induces him to rest easy. Rather, it spurs him to pursue his imperial ambitions all the more vehemently. Thus, after his victory at Cyzicus, Alcibiades immediately levies a tax on the citizens of that city, while at the same time--Xenophon adds significantly--forbidding his

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<sup>41</sup> 1.3.17.

soldiers from plundering the city (1.1.20). He then turns to establishing a colonial network--Proconnesus, Perinthus, Selymbria, Chrysopolis, and then the rest of the Hellespont (1.1.19-22; 1.2.4, 15; 1.3.2-4, 8)--so as to obtain a stable flow of money and supplies. This indicates Alcibiades' long-term goal: to make Cyzicus, and cities like it, into permanent and stable sources of supplies for Athens' future needs. Xenophon thus shows Alcibiades concentrating on the re-establishment of a colonial network by which, in the future, the Athenians might quickly and systematically draw funds, just as the Persians are currently able to draw funds for themselves and the Spartans. By noting Alcibiades' decision to colonize rather than pillage Cyzicus, Xenophon distinguishes Alcibiades' *imperial* ambitions (Alcibiades is designing and installing an imperial architecture) from the ambitions of a mere pillager, who would seek only to plunder, and then to move-on.

To appreciate fully Xenophon's account of Alcibiades here, it is worth contrasting what Alcibiades is able to accomplish *without* an empire, with what the Spartans and the Persians accomplish *with* one. As Pharnabazus made clear in his promise to the Spartans, the chief advantage that the Persians have over Alcibiades is that they can make use of a long-established empire, which as such can quickly and systematically extract funds to supply its projects. In the case of Alcibiades, by contrast, time and energy spent collecting money through pillage and plunder is necessarily time and energy *not* spent fighting the Spartans and their confederates. Time spent *gathering* supplies, Xenophon thus suggests, is time away from *using* supplies. It is therefore all the more impressive that Alcibiades is able to establish colonies without having colonies already in Athens' possession to fall

back on—and, what is more, that he is able to establish these colonies while fighting the Spartans and the Persians all along.

## 5. ALCIBIADES' RETURN TO ATHENS AND THE QUESTION OF THE GODS

In addition to his victories at Abydos and Cyzicus, Xenophon in *Hellenica* Book One shows Alcibiades trounce a combined Spartan-Persian force at Chalcedon (1.3.4-7); seize the city of Byzantium by betrayal (1.3.18-22); and acquire a massive treasure-trove from the Kerameios region (1.4.8-9). Consequently, Alcibiades is elected *in absentia* by the Athenians as their general. This action on the part of the Athenians Alcibiades, in turn, takes as a sign that the people are “well-disposed” (*eunoun* 1.4.12) toward him. So, having been sent for “in private” by his friends, he decides to make his return to the city.

There is almost immediately a problem, however, when Alcibiades approaches Athens—a problem that calls to our attention an aspect of the *Hellenica*'s early chapters which is easily overlooked, namely Xenophon's near-total silence regarding the gods. Thus,

[Alcibiades] sailed into the Peiraius on the day when the city was celebrating the Plynteria (with the statue of Athena being covered<sup>42</sup>), which some prophesied (*oionizonto*) to be a bad omen, both for him and for the city. For, on this day, not one of the Athenians whatsoever (*oudeis...oudenos*) would dare to undertake a serious deed (*spoudaiou ergou*) (1.4.12).

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<sup>42</sup> During the Plynteria (from *plunein*: to wash), the Athenians removed and cleaned the garb of the statue, “Athena Polias”; to preserve the goddess' dignity in the meantime, they covered the statue with a tarp as well as surrounded it with a rope. See Robert Christopher Towneley Parker, “Plynteria,” in Hornblower, Simon, *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Leonhard Schmitz, 1996); “Plynteria,” in Smith, William, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1870) 928. See also Plutarch, *Alcibiades*.



Alcibiades' grand return to Athens, no doubt a decisive stage in his imperial enterprise, is momentarily overshadowed by the Athenians' pious concerns. How does Xenophon intend for us to understand these concerns? As some have noted, Xenophon leaves it unsaid whether Alcibiades knew that the Plynteria would be happening at the time of his return. On the grounds that it was unlikely Alcibiades, a prominent Athenian statesman, would have forgotten a major Athenian holiday, Helfer argues to this end that Alcibiades *deliberately* returned during the Plynteria, knowing the Athenians would be unwilling to take up arms against him at that time.<sup>43</sup> If correct, this interpretation would confirm Alcibiades' shrewdness and his competence as a political mind; for it would confirm Alcibiades' foresight as well as his attentiveness to Athenian piety. What is more, as Helfer argues, it would prompt us to wonder whether Alcibiades had, since the days of his youthful indiscretions, become wiser—perhaps as a result of Socratic tutelage—concerning the deep attachments that political communities have to piety.<sup>44</sup>

Though persuasive as far as it goes, this interpretation misses an obvious consideration. If Alcibiades knew the Plynteria would be happening when he returned, but decided that the Athenians would attend to the forbidden “serious business” of re-accepting him into the city anyway, this serves to confirm that Alcibiades unabashedly put *human* things—namely, Athenian politics and his place within them—above *divine* things, namely

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<sup>43</sup> “Socratic Characters,” 11-12.

<sup>44</sup> “Socratic Characters,” 7-14. A second, more conjectural, interpretation is that Alcibiades' enemies, having learned the day when he would return, purposefully moved the festival from its normal day (which Alcibiades would have known and avoided) to the day of his return. In so doing, they would have made it seem, at least, that Alcibiades held the festival in low esteem, and that he hubristically assumed that the Athenians would attend to his affairs even on a day when they would normally devote themselves to the goddess of their city: Athena.

attending to the goddess. And such a disregard for the gods would be deeply offensive to a pious believer, a fact Xenophon brings to our attention by explicitly pointing out that some of the Athenians “prophesied”<sup>45</sup> that Alcibiades’ return would ruin himself *and* the city.

## 6. ALCIBIADES’ ACCUSERS AND DEFENDERS

This religious dark cloud, which Xenophon casts over Alcibiades at the decisive moment of his return to Athens, calls to our attention Xenophon’s remarkable silence in Books One and Two regarding divine things.<sup>46</sup> By suddenly and unexpectedly raising the question whether there exist gods who might interfere in Alcibiades’ affairs—and Greek affairs, in general—Xenophon introduces a grave complication into the question of the goodness of Alcibiades’ imperial enterprise. For he indicates a tension between the view of those who prophesize Alcibiades’ and Athens’ downfall, on the one hand, and the seemingly favorable way in which he himself has portrayed Alcibiades, so far.

Xenophon spotlights the conflict between these two views by next presenting speeches made by Alcibiades’ defenders and accusers at the time of his return to Athens.

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<sup>45</sup> *Oionizomai* means literally “to take omens from the flight and cries of birds”: Liddell and Scott 550.

<sup>46</sup> Like Thucydides, Xenophon in Books One and Two makes no mention of pre-battle sacrifices: Helfer, “Socratic Characters”; Strauss, “Greek Historians,” 663-664. In chapter two, Xenophon notes that “the temple of Athena in Phocaea was set on fire having been fallen upon by a hurricane” (1.3.1). Xenophon’s including this seemingly irrelevant detail here, together with the strange language he uses, inspire perplexity. *Empitno* (to fall upon: See 2.2.14) is an archaic poetic verb used mostly in Attic tragedy. Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* has the chorus use it to describe the actions of divine spirits (*daimones*: See Liddell and Scott 1167 and 1468). Additionally, Xenophon’s word for hurricane, *prester*, seems to have connoted divine punishments. Herodotus uses it when describing a storm that destroyed part of the Persian army when it was camping at the foot of Mt. Ida before invading Greece (*Histories* 7.42.2); and Hesiod uses it to describe the storm Zeus sent to destroy the monster Typhoeus (*Theogony* 846). Additionally, Xenophon mentions early in chapter one that the Spartan general Mindarus was in the middle of sacrificing to Athena when he decided to aid the Spartan forces under Doreius. Xenophon’s including this very precise detail is remarkable, given the imprecision with which he describes the events at the beginning of chapter one: We learn neither *when* nor *where* Thymochares and Agesandridas fight their battle, the first to be described in the *Hellenica* (1.1.1).

Xenophon identifies neither of these views as his own. Rather, in the mouths of Alcibiades' defenders, he places a persuasive, highly-pragmatic speech:

Some of them said that he was the most capable (*kratistos*) of the citizens; that he alone was banished without just cause, but rather because he was plotted against by those who had less power than he and spoke less well and operated politically (*politeuontōn*) with a view to their own private gain, whereas he was always augmenting the common (*to koinon*), both by his own [power] and by the power of the city. (1.4.13-16)

From Alcibiades' accusers, by contrast, we hear this statement alone: "Others said that he alone had been responsible for their past evils, and there was the risk that he would be the leader (*hegemon*) of the evils that they feared would come about for the city" (1.4.17). The glaring disproportion between these two speeches as Xenophon presents them is consistent with Xenophon's favorable depiction of Alcibiades' military and political capacities. Indeed, if the accusers earnestly intended to rebut the defenders, they would seem to have misgauged. For, as Xenophon reports their speech, the accusers largely ignore the defense's most compelling points: Alcibiades' competence, the dubiousness of his original accusers, and the likelihood that he would seek honor for himself by advancing the common [good] of Athens. Likewise, they refrain from refuting the most questionable strand of the defense's argument, namely that Alcibiades should not be blamed for betraying the Athenians to the Spartans. The best way to make sense of this disproportion is to assume that Alcibiades' accusers consisted mainly of those Athenians who "prophesied" that Alcibiades would come to ruin. These might have regarded their own case as not being in need of elaboration, perhaps believing that Alcibiades' past actions, together with his inauspicious return, were so obviously unjust and impious, that they should require no further explanation.

As we might expect, the relative strength of the argument made by Alcibiades' defenders helps Alcibiades to succeed in his goal of becoming Athens' head general. After presenting us with Alcibiades' defenders and accusers, Xenophon shows us Alcibiades speaking to the Athenian "Council and Assembly":

[Alcibiades] defended himself (*apologesamenos*) on the grounds that he had not been impious, but rather, said that he had been done injustice; and other such things were argued. However, with no one contradicting them—since the *Assembly* would not have allowed it—he was elected autocratic leader. (*hegemon autocrator* 1.4.20)

Xenophon notes that it was the Assembly (*ecclesia*), and not the Council (*boulē*), that Alcibiades spoke to—a crucial detail, considering the Council's volatile reputation. (The Council is to execute four innocent generals roughly a year later, at the end of Book One: 1.7.3.) Accordingly, Xenophon implies that whereas the Assembly was likely to forbid speeches attacking Alcibiades ("no one contradicted them, since the Assembly would not have allowed it"), the Council, by contrast, probably *would* have permitted such speeches.

## 7. NOTIUM AND ALCIBIADES' DISMISSAL

Alcibiades secures his election, then, by means of skillful political maneuvering; he manages to avoid the more democratic, more hostile, of Athens' two chambers. Nevertheless, at the time of Alcibiades' appointment, there remain two looming questions on the horizon. (1) Given the enduring presence of a significant number of Athenians opposing Alcibiades, how stable is Alcibiades' position as general? Moreover, (2) how do things stand for Alcibiades with respect to the gods?

Having left Notium to assist Thrasybulus at Phocaea, Alcibiades temporarily delegates his authority as general to Antiochos, whom he expressly orders *not* to attack Lysander's fleet (1.5.11). Nevertheless, after an unspecified elapse of time, Antiochos sails out of Notium—with his own ship, plus one other—for the harbor of the Ephesians, where the Spartan fleet under Lysander lies in wait. Lysander immediately engages Antiochos; this, in turn, prompts the rest of the Athenians to come to Antiochos' aid; and, in the resulting battle, the Athenians suffer a defeat.

When the news of the defeat reaches Athens, the Athenians immediately dismiss Alcibiades. This is to say, within a single chapter, the Athenians literally reverse their judgment of Alcibiades: They go from lauding him as “the most capable (*kratistos*) of the citizens” (1.4.), to condemning him as “incapable” (*akrateian* 1.5.16) after the defeat at Notium. This reversal is doubly puzzling, for Xenophon makes clear that Alcibiades was by no means *obviously* responsible for the Athenian defeat at Notium, and, by the same token, that the defeat by no means revealed him as obviously incompetent.

Rather, the result of Notium would seem only to reveal the dominant role of chance in human affairs. Consider the specific circumstances of the battle. Alcibiades judged it necessary to assist Thrasybulus at Phocaea, and so decided to leave his post at Notium temporarily. This we have seen him do before, on several occasions; yet nothing like the defeat at Notium occurred. At Chalcedon in 408 BCE, for example, Alcibiades delegates power to his generals while he “goes to the Hellespont and the Chersonese in order to demand money” (1.3.8). In his absence, the generals make an agreement with Pharnabazus—one which Alcibiades promptly renegotiates upon his return (1.3.11-12).

(One wonders what might have happened during Alcibiades' absence had Pharnabazus initiated an attack, instead of "waiting in Chalcedon until Alcibiades should return from Byzantium" (1.3.11), or worse, if the Persians had sent a shrewder, more aggressive general, like Cyrus the Younger.<sup>47</sup>) Accordingly, at Notium, Alcibiades judged that Antiochos was the general most fit to command in his stead. Of course, we might reasonably question whether Thrasybulus' business was in fact more pressing, just as we might reasonably question whether Alcibiades really needed to abandon Chalcedon in order to demand money from the Hellespont and Chersonese. And we might also wonder whether Antiochos was as trustworthy as Alcibiades believed him to be, just as we might question Alcibiades' decision to delegate to the generals at Chalcedon. Yet in both of these episodes, Xenophon gives no indication that Alcibiades was acting in a particularly reckless or careless manner. Rather, taking such risks would seem to come with the territory of operating in the daring, aggressive manner characteristic of Alcibiades.

As we have seen in the course of our analysis, then, Alcibiades took countless other risks without suffering any comparable outcome. The very man who jumped ships after learning he had been condemned in Athens; who double-crossed the Spartans, the Persians, and the Athenians at the same time; who allegedly seduced and impregnated the wife of the king of Sparta, while living in Sparta after having been condemned to death by the Athenians;<sup>48</sup> who escaped on horseback by moonlight from a Persian prison—this man lost everything through a routine delegation of power!

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<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., *Anabasis* Book One.

<sup>48</sup> Alcibiades was rumored to have fathered a future contender for the Spartan kingship, one Leotychidas, having impregnated Timaea, the wife of Agis. Xenophon has his Agesilaus allude to this rumor when he

## 8. XENOPHON'S JUDGMENT OF ALCIBIADES

If Alcibiades was in fact the most capable of the citizens, as Xenophon suggests in his depiction, and as many of the Athenians declared him to be, then why did he come to ruin so abruptly? Does not his failure at Notium, and with the Athenian *demos*, in effect prove or reveal his *incompetence*? According to this view, Alcibiades' downfall must have been the result of some error, which a more capable man would have avoided. As we have seen, however, Alcibiades' proven ability to restore Athenian power and prestige against all odds—that is, in the face of a Persian-funded Sparta—undercuts the view that his defeat at Notium somehow revealed his latent incompetence. As Xenophon depicts him in Books One and Two, Alcibiades would seem to possess many, if not all, of the qualities necessary for restoring the Athenian empire, and then expanding it substantially. Furthermore, by taking seriously the possibility that Alcibiades is the most capable of all the Athenians—perhaps even of all the *Greeks*—Xenophon encourages his readers to consider whether Alcibiades is in some sense *worthy* of empire, and whether an empire capable of conquering Persia might benefit the Greeks in an important way.

The two most plausible explanations of Alcibiades' fall, which I have attempted to sketch out on the basis of Xenophon's account, let me now attempt to summarize. First, the unexpected failure of the most impressive statesman of the *Hellenica*'s first two books points *not* to some buried tactical error on that man's part, but rather, to the unfathomable

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contends with Leotychidas over the kingship: see 3.3.2. See also Plutarch, "Alcibiades," 23.7-8, and "Agesilaus," 3.1-2; Marincola, *Landmark*, 96 n. 3.2.2 a., *ad loc.*

degree to which human affairs are governed by chance, i.e., by necessities that are beyond our ability to anticipate. According to this view, there is definite limit to man's capacity to order his affairs. Precisely what this limit is, however, is extremely difficult to say; and human affairs consequently remain unpredictable.

The second plausible explanation is that Alcibiades came to premature ruin, not as a result of blind necessities which we could not reasonably expect him to have foreseen, but rather, through his impious conduct towards the gods. By mentioning the unpropitious circumstances of Alcibiades' return, Xenophon encourages his pious readers to doubt whether Alcibiades' successes and return to Athens in fact bode well for the city. Indeed, he would seem to be prompting his readers to wonder if political and military greatness are not in deep tension with the demands of piety and attentiveness to the gods. As we recall, in describing Alcibiades' return, Xenophon depicts the Athenians as having to choose between "serious business" (calling assemblies in both legislative chambers to hear Alcibiades and to decide whether to elect him head general) and attending to the gods (setting aside serious business and honoring "Athena Polias"). The gods as the city understands them (i.e., the gods in the perspective of conventional piety) sometimes demand that men, to prove their reverence, set aside precisely what the city needs—precisely what men regard as most humanly "serious." One thinks, for example, of Nicias' insistence that the Athenians, during their retreat from Syracuse, throw strategy to the winds and wait "thrice-nine days" at Syracuse in accordance with the diviners' commands. Accordingly, for the Athenians, such pious devotion would entail setting aside the quest to restore the power of the city by means of Alcibiades—a quest which, as we have seen,



depends on rapid execution in order to succeed. The dictates of piety would therefore seem to be in deep tension with the Athenians' pursuit of the serious business of political greatness.

### III. Thrasybulus

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Thrasybulus of Steiria, we find an empire-seeker of a different kind. Alcibiades, as we have seen, remained suspiciously silent regarding the gods and struggled continuously with the Athenian *demos*. Thrasybulus, by contrast, embraces the *demos*, is embraced, in turn, and claims that the gods fight on his side. Yet Thrasybulus, like Alcibiades before him, steps on the *Hellenica*'s scene when Athens is in crisis. We thus wonder if he, with his particular mode of imperialism different from Alcibiades', will succeed where Alcibiades failed.

In the wake of its crushing defeat at Aegospotami, without the counsel of Alcibiades, faced with the formidable Spartan general, Lysander, and burdened with the fear that its downfall was somehow divinely orchestrated—Athens at the beginning of *Hellenica* Book Two is at its lowest ebb. As the Athenians themselves express, it is likely that they, the former terror of Greece's "little cities" (*micropolitas*), will now suffer precisely what the little cities, such as Melos, once suffered "unjustly" at the hands of the Athenians (2.2.10). Athens ultimately avoids this grim fate, through Sparta's remarkable intervention: "The Lacedaemonians asserted that they would not enslave the Greek city that had worked toward a great good during the greatest dangers that had ever arisen (*genomenois*) for Greece" (2.2.20).

Consequently, as Xenophon periodically reminds us in the remainder of the *Hellenica*, Athens remains eager to regain its former empire (3.5.1-2, 3.5.10, and 3.5.16).

However, as we might well conclude on the basis of Chapter One above, such a comeback appears unlikely without an Alcibiades at Athens' helm. For as we saw in the *Hellenica's* opening chapters, the course that Greek affairs will take seems likely to hinge on the fate of Alcibiades. Do Athens' retained ambitions, then, amount to little more than delusions of grandeur?

The answer to this question depends, I argue in this chapter, crucially on the imperial ambitions of Thrasybulus, an Athenian general and democratic statesman whose remarkable career is, unlike that of Alcibiades, easily overlooked. Thrasybulus appears in Greek affairs only sporadically, Xenophon's account of him consisting of multiple distinct narratives, separated from each other by a considerable number of years. In the first of these narratives, Thrasybulus, in 403 BCE, leads a successful rebellion against the Spartan military junta at Athens, known in the *Hellenica* as the "Thirty Oligarchs," after which he manages to restore Athens' democratic regime. Then, roughly thirteen years later (from 390-389 BCE), Thrasybulus reappears as the leader of a brief, wondrous, yet ultimately unsuccessful attempt at reestablishing the Athenian empire. Thrasybulus thus stands at the helm of Athens at that city's critical moments. By overthrowing the Thirty and reestablishing democracy, he liberates Athens from Spartan domination, restores it as a contender in Greek affairs, and purposefully lays the groundwork for a renewed Athenian empire. Moreover, by reinitiating Athenian imperial expansion in 390-389 BCE—only to be killed unexpectedly during a routine mission—Thrasybulus effectively decides the fate of Athens and its role as an empire in Greece. For after Thrasybulus' failed 390-389 campaign, Athens never again makes a serious attempt to restore its empire. Had

Thrasybulus succeeded in this campaign, it is probable that Athens might have finally achieved the imperial ambitions it nurtured under Alcibiades, and under Alcibiades' great imperial predecessors, Miltiades and Themistocles.

## 2. THRASYBULUS AND ALCIBIADES

Thrasybulus makes several important contributions to events described in the final chapters of Thucydides' work, as well as in the *Hellenica*'s early chapters. In the former, Thrasybulus organizes a coup against the Oligarchy of the 400,<sup>49</sup> thereby establishing himself as one of the leading men of Athens' democratic faction—a role he will continue to play in the *Hellenica*. Additionally, both Thucydides and Xenophon note Thrasybulus' effective, albeit ancillary, role as a general in Alcibiades' campaigns for Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War. Perhaps most importantly, however, Thrasybulus lobbies on multiple occasions in Athens for the return of the exiled Alcibiades.<sup>50</sup> In so doing, Thrasybulus evinces remarkable statesmanship: As a committed democrat, Thrasybulus would have been politically at odds with the anti-democratic Alcibiades.<sup>51</sup> Thrasybulus was sufficiently shrewd to recognize that the future of Athens as a strong, independent, imperial city depended in part on Alcibiades; he was a partisan of the demos who discerned that the future security of the demos depended on a man whom the demos regarded as “one who desired tyranny” (*hōs turannidos epithumōnti*).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Thucydides 8.73-76.

<sup>50</sup> 8.81 and 8.98.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Thucydides 6.15.4. See also Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, 109; Michael Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good* (Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Thucydides 6.15.4.

Thrasybulus thus emerges at the end of the Peloponnesian War as a kind of bridge between the two characteristic aspects of Athens which often threaten to undermine one another: its democratic government and its imperial ambitions. And so it is no surprise that both of Thrasybulus' two shining moments—his role in the revolt from the Thirty, and his attempt at reestablishing the empire—confirm his capacities and ambitions as, respectively, a democratic statesman and an imperialist. And, as we shall see, his capacities (both political and military) in both of these moments at least *appear* to be proportional to his ambitions—a characterization which cannot be attributed to most of the *Hellenica*'s characters.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, all the more shocking—and perhaps, disappointing—is Thrasybulus' sudden fall from power, which, as I will suggest, appears to be fortuitous and so in no way a reflection of incompetence on Thrasybulus' part. Thrasybulus' ignominious downfall, like Alcibiades', seems to have been calculated by Xenophon to achieve two aims: (1) frustrate the high expectations we have built up in studying Thrasybulus' ascent, and, in response to these frustrations, (2) prompt us to investigate its causes and significance.

Xenophon informs us that Thrasybulus, a full general at the time of his participation in Alcibiades' campaign, was only a trierarch at the battle of Argenusai (1.6.35).<sup>54</sup> Since that battle took place after Alcibiades had been exiled the second time, for the Athenian loss at Notium (see 1.5.17, and Chapter Two, above); and since Thrasybulus must have

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<sup>53</sup> Our examination of Thymochares, Mindarus, Doreius, and Agesandridas at the beginning of the last chapter suggests this.

<sup>54</sup> See Peter Krentz, "The Argenusai Affair," in *The Landmark Hellenica*, 317-321.

been well known in Athens as a supporter of Alcibiades (having advocated for his recall), it is likely that Thrasybulus was demoted on account of his proximity to, and his obvious appreciation for, Alcibiades.<sup>55</sup>

Xenophon corroborates Thrasybulus' proximity to Alcibiades in Theramenes' trial by the Thirty Oligarchs. Theramenes, for his part, was originally a member of the Spartan-appointed Thirty (2.3.2); but when he refused to participate in the oligarchy's most rapacious exploits, initiated by Critias, Theramenes was in turn prosecuted by Critias and the rest of the Thirty, for betraying the oligarchy's cause. One of the Thirty's charges against Theramenes was that he had refused to participate in precisely those acts that were necessary to solidify the oligarchy. Theramenes retorted by questioning whether the measures Critias and his followers were following were actually prudent; to this effect, he cited the exiles, Alcibiades and Thrasybulus, as men who could pose a threat to the Thirty's rule as "capable leaders of the many" (*plēthei hegemonēs hikanoi* 2.3.43). Now this remark makes it sound as if Alcibiades and Thrasybulus had been exiled *en bloc*; in fact, however, roughly two years had elapsed between the time of Alcibiades' exile, after Notium (406 BCE), and Thrasybulus' exile, which must have taken place sometime<sup>56</sup> between Athens' decision to capitulate to the Spartans and the formation of the Thirty, both of which events took place in 404 BCE.

This detail leads us to a second, and more significant, inaccuracy in Theramenes' statement, namely the political motivations of the respective exiles. Alcibiades, as we

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<sup>55</sup> See *Landmark*, 412.

<sup>56</sup> Xenophon, interestingly, does not tell us the circumstances of Thrasybulus' exile, only that he was exiled: see *Landmark*, 412.

recall, had been exiled *in absentia* by “the Athenians.” And Xenophon, as we also recall, there refrains from specifying which, if any, particular faction within Athens sought Alcibiades’ removal. However, the fact that “the Athenians” in question immediately replaced Alcibiades and his staff with, among others, the notorious democratic partisan, Konon,<sup>57</sup> suggests that the democratic, anti-oligarchic (and hence, anti-Alcibiadian) faction was a major player in the decision. Alcibiades’ second exile would therefore seem to have been, to no small extent, democratically motivated. By contrast, the exile of Thrasybulus, which coincided with the capitulation of the democracy to Sparta and the rise of the oligarchic Thirty, would seem to have been decidedly *anti*-democratic in motivation. It was the oligarchic faction within Athens that must have chosen soon-to-be member of the Thirty, Theramenes, to negotiate a surrender with the Spartans (2.2.17).

Theramenes’ conflation of these details concerning Alcibiades and Thrasybulus suggest that Thrasybulus was perceived by his fellow Athenians as closely associated with Alcibiades. Theramenes thus groups Thrasybulus together with Alcibiades as two examples of “capable leaders” who, as such, are likely to pose a threat to the Thirty if disaffected. This is high praise of Thrasybulus, indeed, considering Alcibiades’ tremendous capacities displayed in Book One. What is more, Theramenes’ wariness of Thrasybulus as a potential threat comparable to Alcibiades presages the decisive role Thrasybulus will in fact play in effectively overthrowing the Thirty. By the same token, Theramenes’ pointing to Thrasybulus as a potential leader of the people suggests that

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<sup>57</sup> Robin Seager, “Thrasybulus, Conon and Athenian Imperialism, 396-386 B. C.,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 87 (1967): 95-115.

Thrasybulus had, at this point, established a reputation for himself in Athens as one of the city's foremost democratic statesmen.

### **3. LEADER AT PHULE: THRASYBULUS' DEMOCRATIC REVOLT AGAINST THE THIRTY**

At the end of the Peloponnesian War, the Thirty Oligarchs far surpassed any single faction within Athens, which, as a whole, had been decimated both by defeat in battle and by plague and starvation at the end of the Peloponnesian War (2.2). Moreover, shortly after coming to power, the Thirty requested from Sparta, and received, a contingent of hoplites to help secure their rule (2.3.14). The Thirty then used these hoplites as personal assassins to begin systematically executing those men of Athens whom they regarded as “least likely to accept being pushed aside and kept out of public life” (2.3.14). And once they had executed Theramenes, the Thirty evicted from Athens, and seized the property of, all the Athenians not part of the three-thousand “gentlemen” (*kaloi kagathoi*) whom the Thirty had chosen to bestow favors on (2.4). As a result, many Athenian refugees fled to nearby Thebes and Megara (2.4.1).

We can only imagine the degraded, defeated state of mind of the Athenian refugees at the time of the Thirty's ascent to power. Dispersed and property-less in foreign cities, it was probably tempting for most of these refugees simply to assimilate into their new surroundings, and to eschew any attempt at recapturing Athens. And, with the Thirty having put to death many of the most public-spirited, ambitious men not allied with themselves, it would seem all the less likely that the exiles would find men among themselves sufficiently daring *and* intelligent to recapture their city. This, then, is the vivid



picture that Xenophon paints for us at the beginning of Thrasybulus' campaign against the Thirty. That campaign begins in the following way. Thrasybulus, who had temporarily resettled in Thebes, one day "set out from [that city] with seventy men, and seized Phule, a fortress with a commanding position" (2.4.2). It is telling of the temper of the dispersed Athenians that, of the thousands—perhaps *tens* of thousands—that would have ended up as refugees in Thebes, only *seventy* were willing at first to join Thrasybulus' campaign. It is equally telling, however, that Thrasybulus dared to undertake such a campaign. For seventy exiles to take on the largest city in Greece—even if that city has been crippled by war, both foreign and civil—is an astonishingly bold undertaking.

What enterprise does Thrasybulus here envision? Xenophon begins to answer this question in the paragraphs that follow (2.4.2-7). Thrasybulus evidently intends to use Phule as a wedge by means of which to reopen the city for himself and the democrats. His wedge, in turn, begins to work when the Thirty attempt to retake Phule, having brought with them the Three-Thousand, as well as the cavalry (2.4.2). Vastly outnumbering their enemies, the Thirty no doubt anticipate a speedy and decisive outcome. Xenophon even notes, in the same compound sentence in which he lists the military forces that the Thirty bring with them to Phule, that "the day was surpassingly beautiful" (2.4.2). The Thirty perhaps regard the beauty of the day, together with their overwhelmingly superior forces, as a kind of cosmic promise of their assured success over their enemies. Accordingly, as we might expect, the sunny confidence that fills their ranks causes some of the Thirty's forces immediately to rush headlong at the fortress—evidently without forethought: "Immediately, some of the boldest of the young men charged at the fortress." Things

quickly turn sour, however: “But they achieved (*epoiesan*) nothing, *and* they sustained injuries” (2.4.2-3 my italics). The Thirty’s heedlessness here recalls the initial confusion and absence of vision which Xenophon depicts at the *Hellenica*’s opening.

At this point, things only get worse for the Thirty. After their initial defeat, they take no further action on the beautiful day on which they arrived, instead “wishing” (*boulomenon*) to lay siege to Phule, so as to starve it from supplies (2.4.2). Yet they fail to start work on the day of their arrival, evidently believing that there is no need for them to act quickly. They must have anticipated seizing the fortress through their initial charge; and consequently, when their attempt failed, they were forced to pursue a plan (laying siege) which they initially wished to avoid.

Their subsequent decision to wait proves, however, to be the undoing of their entire campaign: “Snow came upon them (*epigignetai*)<sup>58</sup> for the entire (*pamphlethes*) night, and into the next day. So the men who were being snowed-upon (*hoi niphomenoi*) went away into their city [Athens], having lost many of their baggage carriers to the men of Phule” (2.4.3). There is irony in Xenophon’s words here, for not only do the Thirty, who massively outnumbered their enemy, fail even to *begin* walling off the fortress; they also end up losing most of their supplies to precisely the men whom they intended to *deprive* of supplies by laying siege. What is more, after an ignominious retreat, the Thirty realize that their country houses in the countryside surrounding Phule are likely to be plundered by the forces of Thrasybulus. In what would seem to be a comically-oligarchic version of Pericles’ famous

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<sup>58</sup> *Epigignomai* can also have the sense of “attack.”

decision to donate his country houses to the city of Athens, lest the Spartans choose not to plunder them during their invasion of Attica,<sup>59</sup> the Thirty send out from Athens the Spartan contingent of hoplites (originally given to them by Lysander) to guard their country estates from the exiles at Phule.

Now the effect that Thrasybulus' astonishing repulsion of the Thirty has on the Athenian exiles is a massive one. To continue our previous metaphor, Thrasybulus succeeds at Phule in firmly securing his wedge into Athens; it now remains for him to apply the requisite pressure. Xenophon thus begins the very next paragraph by informing us that "*already (ede)* there were around seven-hundred men gathered at Phule" (2.4.5 my italics). This rapid tenfold increase of the number of Athenian exiles at Phule confirms that, given the right conditions, Thrasybulus needed to accomplish just the right daring feat in order to stir the spirits of the Athenian exiles. Xenophon thus spotlights the explosive effects that can emanate from a single, seemingly insignificant military event. Accordingly, the relevance of this insight to imperial ambition is obvious enough: Given the right mixture of talent, shrewdness, and luck, a single man with a few soldiers might multiply his military and political power exponentially through a handful of battles.

In the passages that follow, Xenophon shows Thrasybulus putting this insight to use. Having assembled seven-hundred exiles in the fortress, and having thereby established his wedge into Athens, Thrasybulus initiates the next stage of his campaign against the Thirty. (It is important to note here that, just as we saw in the case of Alcibiades in Chapter

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<sup>59</sup> Thucydides 2.13.1.

Two, it is Thrasybulus, and *not* his enemy, who initiates each stage of this campaign.) Just as Thrasybulus moved first by seizing Phule, now he moves first by attacking the Thirty's Spartan guards encamped outside Phule. This attack he plans after having observed that, each morning,<sup>60</sup> there is a time when the Spartans are off their guard, each attending to his own affairs (2.4.5). Having observed this pattern, Thrasybulus accordingly initiates a sudden attack, precisely when the Spartans (whose contingent far outnumbers the seven-hundred man Athenian force) least expect it. In the ensuing rout, several Spartan cavalry and more than one hundred and twenty hoplites are killed; Xenophon mentions no Athenian casualties (2.4.6-7).

Here, as with the initial defeat of the Thirty at Phule, the extent of the physical damage sustained by the Thirty is far exceeded by the *moral* damage: "After this, the Thirty no longer believed that their affairs (*sphisi ta pragmata*) were secure (*asphale* 2.4.8)."<sup>61</sup> By implication, the Thirty up until this point had regarded their affairs as secure, both by their own numerical superiority, and by the Spartans assigned to guard them. They are thus astonished, and shaken, by the capacity of Thrasybulus and his men to make war effectively—a fact Xenophon draws our attention to by noting, rather perplexingly, that among the cavalymen killed by Thrasybulus' men was one Nicostratus, "called 'the noble'" (2.4.6). Perhaps, like Nicostratus, the Thirty and their three-thousand supporters (the self-proclaimed gentlemen or "noble and good") regarded their own (professed) nobility as a source of protection from an ignominious fate. The undignified fate of the

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<sup>60</sup> Xenophon uses progressive verbs in this sentence, indicating both that the Spartans repeated this sequence of events daily, and that Thrasybulus espied them repeating it daily.

<sup>61</sup> Literally: "immovable."

“noble” Nicostratus—struck down at dawn while having his horse rubbed down (2.4.6)—accordingly illustrates the distressing fragility of noble men, and the inability of their nobility to protect them.

With their confidence crushed and their forces considerably weakened, the Thirty proceed now to establish a private residence for themselves in the nearby town of Eleusis, “so that there might be a place for them to flee to, if it were necessary” (2.4.8). With this action, the Thirty concede the (likely) possibility that their rule in Athens will come to an end, perhaps as a direct result of the rebellion instigated by Thrasybulus. This is a remarkable concession, since, even if Thrasybulus’ numbers are growing rapidly as a result of his victory, still, at least *physically* speaking, the Thirty’s numerical superiority—three-thousand “*kaloi kagathoi*,” together with the remainder of Lysander’s Spartan contingent—would seem to assure the Thirty’s safety or security (*asphale*). Their sudden implementation of this contingency plan, Xenophon suggests, bespeaks their *felt* inferiority to Thrasybulus’ forces. The effect of Xenophon’s depiction of the Thirty, then, is to suggest that a dramatic shift has occurred with respect to the strength and impetus of the two sides; without quite understanding it, we somehow discern—as do the Thirty themselves—that, despite their retained numerical superiority, the balances have shifted, and that Thrasybulus and his followers now stand in the position of resurgence.

#### **4. JUSTICE AND THE GODS: THRASYBULUS’ SPEECH AT PIRAEUS**

Whether this felt shift is a result of merely human hopes and expectations; or, alternatively, if there is something super-human at work on Thrasybulus’ behalf,

Thrasybulus himself explicitly addresses in his speech to the Athenian exiles before their invasion of Piraeus. His speech here—his first in the *Hellenica*, and the longest pre-battle exhortation in the work—is a deeply moving one, evidently calculated by Xenophon to cause us to admire Thrasybulus. Accordingly, Xenophon here reproduces no speech of Critias, or of any of the Thirty. He clearly intends Thrasybulus to be the focus of our attention, and perhaps, of our hopes.

The context of his speech is tense and dramatic. After the Thirty had seized Eleusis, Thrasybulus set out with one-thousand men from Phule to invade the port of Athens, Piraeus. (From this, we gather that within four days,<sup>62</sup> the seven-hundred exiles at Phule—originally only 70—had swelled to over a thousand men.) After Thrasybulus seized the port, the Thirty (again, slow to act) set out to recapture it, “taking the wagon road from Athens to Piraeus” (2.4.10). Thrasybulus in turn attempted to prevent the Thirty from even entering the town; but when he discovered his numbers were insufficient, he had the exiles “form in close order” (*sunepeirathesan*)—i.e., *deliberately*, and not in a chaotic retreat—at the hill of Mounichia, within Peiraieus (2.4.11). With the Athenians occupying the higher ground (the Thirty will be forced to try to take the hill), Thrasybulus gives a lengthy oration “from the middle” of the army (2.4.12).

Thrasybulus’ speech exhorts the Athenians, who have been forced out of their city without having done anything unjust to deserve it (2.4.14), to recapture their “fatherland,” and with it, “our homes, our freedom, our honors,<sup>63</sup> our children, and—for those of us who

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<sup>62</sup> See 2.4.13.

<sup>63</sup> Or, perhaps, “offices” (*timas*).

have them—our wives” (2.4.17). The speech has a moral logic at its core, as is manifest from the above quotations. On the one hand, the Athenians have been unjustly deprived of their city, and everything that goes with it, by contemptible men: Thrasybulus mocks Thirty’s Spartan allies as the ones whom they defeated in battle “four days ago,” outside of Phule. To this end, Thrasybulus emphasizes the retributive dimension of his speech, by noting that he and his allies have been “praying” constantly for an opportunity to face the Thirty and their followers in battle. Thus, Thrasybulus and his followers seek to recapture what is their own; but they *also* wish to punish those who unjustly took it from them: This is the first component of his speech, whose noble, high-minded character he underlines with these quasi-Periclean concluding words: “Even someone who is slain here will be happy (*eudaimon*); for no one, however wealthy, could make such a noble memorial” (*mnemeiou* 2.4.17).<sup>64</sup> This is a remarkable promise: Even in death, one who lays down his life in service of recapturing Athens will be happy. The goods that come from recapturing the city and enjoying it *in life*, then, are not the only goods that Thrasybulus believes the Athenians should seek in fighting this battle. Recapturing the city and punishing the Thirty is so noble, we might venture to say, that it is worth dying for.

This elevated promise of happiness brings us to the second component of Thrasybulus’ speech. Thrasybulus, as we noted above, lists six goals the exiles are pursuing in invading Athens. The first two items—fatherland and homes—concern places of dwelling. Yet whereas homes belong to individual men and families within the city, the

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Thucydides 2.43.2-5.

fatherland points to something in common, as well as something ancestral (Thrasybulus could have said “city,” instead). The last two items—children and wives—have more in common with “homes” than with “the fatherland,” for Thrasybulus even chooses to mention that some of the exiles do not have children, or wives, or both. Homes, children, and wives, then, might be part of the fatherland, but they are not held in common the way the fatherland is. Similarly, they are more tangible than the fatherland; they are goods that the individual men with Thrasybulus can enjoy in an obvious, non-abstract way. By the same token, however, being less abstract and more individual, it would make less sense for a man to be willing to die for another man’s home, children, and wife, than it would for him to die for a fatherland, which he and his fellow citizens share in common. Accordingly, just as the last two items on the list—“children and wives”—have more in common with the second item—“homes”—similarly, the middle two items—“freedom and honors”—would seem to be closer to “fatherland.” Both are elevated goals which individual men, as well as whole cities, pursue; moreover, they are goals that have a core moral and political significance: A serious citizen would probably say that both freedom and honors are, like the fatherland, ends that one might nobly die for. It would perhaps make more sense (in the context of Thrasybulus’ exhortation to be willing to die nobly fighting to recapture Athens) to cite the fatherland, freedom, and honors—rather than homes, children, and wives—as objects worth dying for. Additionally, “freedom and honors” capture the twin aspects of Athens with which Thrasybulus has revealed himself to be concerned: the democracy and the empire. As the leading statesman of Athens’ democratic faction, Thrasybulus would value freedom; and as an ambitious imperialist, Thrasybulus would be concerned with



“honors.”

The third component of Thrasybulus’ speech is entwined with the first two: the emphasis which he places on the gods. In the order of ideas in the speech, Thrasybulus asserts the justice of the exiles (who were forcibly removed by the Thirty), as well as the shamefaced *injustice* of the Thirty. It is on the basis of this position that Thrasybulus proceeds to speak of the gods, announcing that he and his followers have been “always praying” (*aei euchometha*) to be able to face the Thirty in battle (2.4.13-14). The gods, accordingly, have answered their prayers: Thrasybulus asserts boldly that “the gods...now manifestly (*phaneros*) are fighting as allies (*summachousi*) for our advantage” (2.4.14).<sup>65</sup> On this score, he proclaims that the snowstorm--which, as we saw, played a decisive role in enabling the men at Phule to fend off the Thirty--was sent by the gods (2.4.14). Likewise, he points to the present battle positions of the Thirty as evidence of providence: “Even now, [the gods] have brought us into an area in which our enemies will not be able to throw spears or javelins, on account of the steep ascent” (2.4.15). This is an interesting belief to maintain, in light of Xenophon’s description of how the battle-location came to be determined. Thrasybulus’ forces at first tried to prevent the Thirty from entering the Piraeus at all, having initially seized the town. Only when the exiles discovered that they would be unable to form a sufficient defense of the town did Thrasybulus order them to occupy the hill at Mounichia, from where he delivers his pre-battle oration. Thrasybulus, who seems to be earnest in his beliefs, perhaps sees the gods’ providence at work in the rather

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<sup>65</sup> Xenophon has Cyrus express the same view of the gods—namely, that they are his allies—in the *Education of Cyrus*.

fortuitous way the exiles came to occupy the hill—which, as he correctly anticipates, turns out to be the superior battle position. Originally intending to defend the whole Piraeus from the Thirty, Thrasybulus learns only after the fact that such a defense would be numerically impossible, given the size of the area to be defended.

What this realization on his part betrays, however, is a lack of foresight on Thrasybulus' part. At the least, we can say that Thrasybulus failed to anticipate how he would defend the Piraeus once he had managed to capture it. This suggests that Thrasybulus attacked the Piraeus in a spell of overconfidence, without having considered its logistics. If so, then his occupation of Mounichia would seem to be nothing more than good luck following from poor calculation. If Thrasybulus himself is to be believed, however, it was in fact a divine plan—and *not* the result of a lapse in human judgment on his own part—that brought the exiles to occupy the superior ground. Or, more precisely, what appears *at first* to be a tactical error turns out, in the fullness of time, to have in fact been orchestrated by the gods.

After the Athenians' "divination" in Book One,<sup>66</sup> Thrasybulus' providential view here stands as the boldest and most articulate announcement of what we might call the providential or divine understanding of Greek affairs. Xenophon for his part makes it clear that Thrasybulus' tremendous confidence in the role played by the gods in the exiles' affairs goes together with a tremendous confidence in the justice of the exiles' campaign against the Thirty.

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter Two, above.

## 5. THE FALL OF THE THIRTY AND THE RESTORATION OF THE DEMOCRACY

Whether or not the gods actually fought together with them, the exiles were nevertheless victorious over the Thirty, whose army was destroyed, and many of whose leaders (including the arch-tyrant, Critias) were slain (2.4.19). As a result of their defeat at Piraeus, the remainder of the Thirty are forced out of Athens into exile in Eleusis, their supporters in Athens (the Three-Thousand) having decided to replace the Thirty, by means of election, with ten new magistrates (2.4.23-24). These, in turn, “attended the [affairs] of the town (*astei*)” (2.4.24). The replacement of the Thirty by the Ten does not lead immediately to a reconciliation between the exiles and the “men of the city,” however. For many of those who remained in Athens, having refused to go into exile, were complicit in the Thirty’s crimes against their fellow citizens, not the least of which included seizing property, and killing political dissidents such as Theramenes (2.4.23). Consequently, the men at Athens and the men of the Piraeus continue to prosecute the Athenian civil war well after the capitulation of the Thirty (2.4.24-38). A fuller treatment of the *Hellenica* would need to examine Xenophon’s intricate account of how the Athenian civil war was finally concluded. Given our more limited purposes here, of understanding Thrasybulus as an ambitious empire-seeker, we will confine ourselves in fleshing out Thrasybulus’ role in the restoration of Athens’ imperial democracy.

At the close of Book Two, which is also the close of the civil war at Athens, Thrasybulus asserts in a stirring speech that the conflict between the exiles and the men of the city was a conflict between competing regimes. Addressing the men of the city,

Thrasybulus scolds them for having acted unjustly toward “the people” (*demos* 2.4.40). More importantly, Thrasybulus asserts that the final resolution of the war revealed or confirmed the moral, political, and military superiority of the *demos* over the few, and hence, its just claim to rule. Paraphrasing the Delphic exhortation, he contends:

You men of the town, I advise you to know yourselves; and you would most know yourselves if you attempted to sum up (*analogisaisthe*) that on account of which you pride yourselves (*mega phroneteon*), such that you attempt to rule us. Perhaps you are more just [than us]? Yet, the *demos* is poorer than you, but it did not ever (*popote*) commit injustice against you for the sake of money (*heneca chrematon*). But you, the wealthiest of all, have done (*pepoiekate*) many and shameful [things] for the sake of gain (*kerdeon*). So, since you do not maintain righteousness (*dikaiousunes*), perhaps you pride yourselves on account of your manliness. And what occasion (*krisis*) would be nobler for this than how we fought against each other? Yet you assert that you have judgement (*gnome*)--[you] who had walls and arms and money and the Lacedaemonians as allies, were thwarted by ones who had none of these. You pride yourselves on account of the Lacedaemonians? How, when, just as [people] tie-up snapping dogs and hand them over, so those men handed you over to this *demos*—to whom you have done injustice—and then picked up and left. (2.4.40-42)

Thrasybulus’ speech constitutes an indictment of the non-democratic factions of Athens as unfit for rule. By Thrasybulus’ account, the *demos* surpasses its counterparts on the whole spectrum of the virtues: justice, manliness, shrewdness of judgement, and patriotism. This is proved, Thrasybulus contends, by the sequence of actions on the Thirty’s part that precipitated their own downfall—their executions and property-confiscations of decent Athenians—as well as by their defeat by the democrats, who proved themselves superior (despite their inferior circumstances).

Is this understanding of events warranted by Xenophon’s depiction of them? As we noted above, Xenophon himself never weighs in on the question of whether Thrasybulus’ claims regarding divine intervention are true. The most Xenophon authorizes us to say with

certainty respecting Thrasybulus' affairs is that, given his astonishing political and military successes in the wake of the Thirty's rise to power, it makes sense that Thrasybulus conceived of his aims on behalf of the exiles as *deserving* to succeed, and therefore, as having the support of gods who care about the flourishing of the just and punishment of the wicked. Accordingly, as if to vindicate Thrasybulus' moral confidence, Xenophon chooses to end Book Two with what a democratic reader might readily interpret as an endorsement, on the part of Xenophon himself, of democratic government. For he testifies both to the durability and to the justice of the restored Athenian democracy in Books Two's final clause: "And now (*nun*) they live as citizens (*politeuontai*), and the *demos* abides by its oaths" (2.4.43).<sup>67</sup>

With a victorious Thrasybulus having delivered the final speech, and with Xenophon assuring us of the (long) endurance of the restored Athenian democracy,<sup>68</sup> our expectations as regards that man and his ambitions are thus heightened as Xenophon brings his account of Athenian affairs to a close. Will Thrasybulus—enterprising, popular, and deferential to Athenian piety on a way Alcibiades was not—achieve a synthesis of the political talents that always evaded Alcibiades, namely a synthesis of imperial ambition and democratic statesmanship? Might Thrasybulus be able to replace Alcibiades as Athens' hope for a renewed empire?

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<sup>67</sup> This final sentence is all the more striking, since, in the Greek, the final word is literally *demos*.

<sup>68</sup> Scholars speculate that Xenophon wrote these passages long after his return to Greece from Asia, possibly during the 350's BCE.

## 6. ATHENS' ENTRANCE INTO THE CORINTHIAN WAR

Unsurprisingly, the restoration of the democracy at Athens has profound and lasting consequences for Greek affairs, generally. If Sparta's intention of maintaining Athens as a puppet government had succeeded, Spartan domination of Greece might have been much more readily fulfilled. In Thrasybulus' view, by contrast, the restoration of the democracy—and, perforce, the overthrow of the Spartan junta—were facilitated by gods who favored the justice of the Athenian *demos*. Thrasybulus attempts to internalize the hopes of the Athenian *demos*, and then to articulating them in a coherent vision of Athens' place in the cosmic whole.

Accordingly, it is a part of that vision that Athens' return to the stage of Greek Affairs as an active participant is sanctioned by the gods. Thus, in the years separating Thrasybulus' dominant role in the restoration of the democracy in 403 BCE from his sudden reappearance as an Athenian imperialist in 390-389 BCE—years that witness such events as the Spartan invasion of Persia, the Corinthian War, and Peisander's defeat at Cnidus—Xenophon makes clear that Thrasybulus shaped Athenian policy in a way that proved decisive for the course of Greek affairs, as a whole. For it was Thrasybulus who administered Athens' entrance into the “Corinthian War,” the most substantial war in Greece since the Peloponnesian.

Athens' entrance into this war was occasioned in the following way. After it became clear to the Persians that Agesilaus and his Spartans posed a grave threat to the Persian empire as a whole, Tithraustes—satrap of Artaxerxes and replacement of

Tissaphernes—bribed Thebes and other leading Greek cities to provoke a war with Sparta (3.5.1). Though Xenophon never uses the appellation, this provocation escalated into what later historians have dubbed the Corinthian War<sup>69</sup>—a massive “Greek Affair” if there ever was one, which pitted Sparta and its allies against a coalition including Athens, Thebes, Argos, Corinth, and their respective allies and colonies.<sup>70</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Thucydides’ depiction of the first Sparta Conference and the Melian Dialogue, Xenophon begins his account of the Corinthian War with an up-close look at Thebes’ attempt to persuade Athens to join its anti-Spartan alliance. And it is at this conference that Thrasybulus makes a most revealing appearance.

As regards Greek affairs as a whole, much depends on Thebes’ ability to convince Athens that joining this alliance against Sparta is worthwhile. Thebes has already taken its bribe from the Persians; if it fails to persuade Athens, the only other significant military power in Greece besides Sparta and Thebes, it would necessarily have two face two unpalatable options: (1) take on Sparta, the dominant hegemon of Greece, *without* Athens’ assistance; or (2) explain to Persia why Thebes, despite having taken the bribe money, is refusing to uphold its end of the bargain. It is in the middle of this high-stakes game that the Theban ambassadors craft an argument to the Athenians calculated to stir that city’s dominant passions. On the one hand, the Thebans appeal to the Athenian non-democrats in the audience, arguing that they, especially, should seek retribution against the Spartans, for

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<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., P. J. Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006) 185, 192, 209-211, 227; John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, Oswyn Murray, *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World* (New York: Oxford, 2001) 488.

<sup>70</sup> Xenophon accordingly devotes all of Book Four (and then some: 3.5.1-5.1.31) to chronicling this war.

having “handed you over to the rabble” (*plethei* 3.5.9). This is, of course, a sensible enough statement to make in the presence of Athenian oligarchs, many of whom doubtless resent the fact that Pausanias prevented Lysander from reestablishing an oligarchy after the fall of the Thirty. Yet it is also a shocking statement to make in the presence of the Athenian democrats, whom it characterizes as a bloodthirsty horde not to be trusted with the sound administration of justice. Thus, perhaps sensing their indiscretion, the Thebans deftly pivot: “Consequently, *those* men [the Spartans] would have let you perish; but the *demos*, here, saved you” (3.5.9). With this turn, the Thebans shift the blame away from the punitive “rabble,” to “*those* men”: the selfish, unjust Spartans, who simply abandoned their allies. They thereby emphasize the justice and magnanimity with which the Athenian *demos* restrained its retributive sensibilities, and “saved” the Athenian oligarchs.

Having evoked the Athenian Civil War and the unity that its conclusion brought about, the Thebans now introduce and develop their main concern: “Now, men of Athens, that you wish to establish the empire you used to have, everyone knows (*epistametha*). And how could this come about more reasonably (*eikos*) than if you assisted those who were done injustice to by *those* men [the Spartans]?” (3.5.10). The Thebans then repeat this argument in the course of their brief speech, tempting the Athenians to pursue the very grandest of imperial enterprises, namely the conquest of Persia:

“How is it not likely, if you should lead those that were manifestly done injustice [by the Spartans], that you would now become the greatest of [the cities] by far (*popote*). For, when you *used* to have an empire, you ruled only the [cities] by the sea; but *now*, you might become the rulers of all--of us, of the Peloponnesians, of those you previously ruled, and of the King [of Persia] himself, who holds the greatest power” (3.5.14).



Xenophon here observes that the Thebans' speech was favorably received by the Athenians, "many" of whom "spoke in [the Thebans'] support" (3.5.16). Afterward, "*everyone* voted to aid [Thebes]" (3.5.16).

The Athenians' enthusiastic reaction here indicates that the current democratic regime at Athens by no means takes umbrage at it being attributed to them that they wish to reestablish empire in Greece. And Xenophon, accordingly, places none other than Thrasybulus at the very center of Athens' decision to aid Thebes (3.5.16). It was Thrasybulus who "announced the vote" to the Thebans (3.5.16). In so doing, Thrasybulus confirms his own active role in the deliberations, as well as his own favorable disposition toward the proposal. To this end, Xenophon includes here two statements of Thrasybulus. (These, we should note, are the only remarks we heard directly from an Athenian during this decisive conference.) Thrasybulus announces to the Thebans that, even though Athens remains un-walled,<sup>71</sup> the Athenians will nevertheless run the risk of paying back the Thebans for having refrained from joining Lysander in his invasion of Athens. "'For whereas you,' he said, 'did not join in making war against us, we, at least, will fight with you against *those* men, should they go against you'" (3.5.16-17 my italics). Here we find Thrasybulus' characteristic moral-seriousness on display. Just as, during the Athenian Civil War, Thrasybulus framed his rebellion against the oligarchs in terms of justice—and later, justified the rule of the *demos* in Athens on the grounds of their moral superiority—here we find him promising to wage a war against Sparta on the grounds that that city has

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<sup>71</sup> Lysander tore down the walls during his invasion in 404 BCE (2.2.23).

“moved against” an ally: Thebes.

However, despite Thrasybulus’ professed commitment to aiding Thebes *justly* “should Sparta move against them,” Xenophon complicates this picture by making it clear that it was in fact Thebes, having been bribed by the Persians, who originally instigated the Corinthian War. For “Thebes knew that unless someone found a means to begin a war, the Spartans would not break their treaties” (3.5.3). Thrasybulus in his moral commitment to aiding the Thebans conveniently ignores this fact, no doubt because of his eagerness to reinitiate Athens’ imperial enterprise—a goal Xenophon shortly thereafter shows Thrasybulus to have succeeded in.

## **7. THE CAMPAIGN IN HELLESPONT**

Athens’ entrance into the Corinthian War, instigated by Thrasybulus, thus provides the Athenians with an opportunity to reconquer their former colonies in the Hellespont. And it is none other than Thrasybulus whom the Athenians assign to execute this enterprise. Xenophon frames Thrasybulus’ Hellespont campaign with an explanation of the political events at the island of Rhodes, a democratically governed colony of Athens that had (as a result of the Corinthian War) recently been invaded by the Spartans under the impressive Spartan general, Teleutias (4.8.23-24). Sparta’s decision to send Teleutias to Rhodes, for the purpose of replacing its democratic government with a Sparta-friendly oligarchy, was precipitated by an Athenian-instigated democratic revolution at Rhodes, as a result of which the exiled Rhodian oligarchs made the following plea to Sparta: “It was unworthy of them [the Spartans] to allow the Athenians to conquer Rhodes, and in so doing, assemble

(*sunthemenous*) such power” (4.8.20). Here the Rhodian oligarchs discern what the Spartans do not. Athens’ machinations in the Hellespont region is only part of a broader attempt to reassemble their previous colonies, and to actualize the imperial ambitions which the Thebans encouraged them to pursue at the end of Book Three. Such machinations have been possible for Athens during the Corinthian War (at this point, entering its fifth-year) because Sparta has been too distracted by war with the anti-Spartan coalition to notice events outside of the Peloponnesus and Attica. Thus, it is only *after* the Athenians manage to stage a successful coup at Rhodos that the Spartans decide to send a fleet to the island, so as to reinstate the Rhodian oligarchs.<sup>72</sup>

It is in response to reports about Rhodos, and to Sparta’s return to naval power, generally, that Athens dispatches Thrasybulus across the Aegean. Thrasybulus, however, “made no attempt to help Rhodos,” thinking that the Rhodian democrats were strong enough to preserve themselves against the Spartans.<sup>73</sup> Thrasybulus clearly recognizes that his considerable talents and supplies would be better spent reconquering the Hellespont area than consolidating Athens’ already-secure possessions. He thus initiates a four-part campaign, taking him all the way from the Pontus (the modern-day Black Sea), around the coast of Asia Minor, to Aspendos (at the base of modern-day Turkey).

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<sup>72</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Sparta’s navy at this stage of the *Hellenica* had been vastly diminished as a result of Peisander’s massive defeat at Cnidus by the Persians and Athenians. The Spartans therefore had to start from scratch before sending a fleet to send to Rhodos—which the Athenians, seeking to establish naval hegemony in Greece, quickly catch wind of. Hence, Xenophon begins his account of Thrasybulus’ campaigns by noting that “the Athenians believed that the Lacedaemonians were again organizing power in the sea” (4.8.25).

<sup>73</sup> His expectations in this regard were correct: We learn at the beginning of Book Five that Teleutias, the Spartan general assigned to recapture Rhodos, is, a year later [late 389 BCE], still trying to capture the island [5.1.4-5].

In Xenophon's words, Thrasybulus sets out to Hellespont "believing that he might bring about (*katapraxai*) something good (*agathon*) for his city" (4.8.26). No doubt, Thrasybulus is buoyed by the same sense of moral (and perhaps *divine*) purpose which propelled him to success in the Athenian Civil War. However, as Xenophon makes clear, Thrasybulus' plans are nebulous. It is only once he arrives at Hellespont that he decides precisely how to begin work, learning shortly thereafter about a conflict between two regional powers: Amedokus, King of the Odrysians, and Seuthes, King of Thrace (4.8.26). These Thrasybulus decides to reconcile with one another, so as to make them "friends and allies" of Athens.

Thrasybulus thus exhibits an approach similar to Alcibiades' at the beginning of Book One. There, Xenophon gives no *precise* indication as to Alcibiades' grand strategy; instead, he lets it be inferred that Alcibiades seeks to re-establish for Athens a means for systematically collecting funds by means of colonies. Alcibiades' procedure flowed largely from prudential discretion: He picked individual goals and accomplishing them one-by-one—all, however with a view to a single, overarching aim. Thrasybulus, similarly, holds no fixed plan for restoring Athens' imperial presence in Asia, instead merely sensing that there are better ways that this might be done than through fighting the Spartans at Rhodes. Accordingly, by reconciling the Thracians and making them allies of Athens, Thrasybulus believed that the Greek cities on the coast of Thrace would be more likely to side with the Athenians if these rulers were friends (4.8.27). Xenophon, for his part, confirms this to be true: "These things, and the cities in Asia, came out nobly (*exontōn kalōs*) for the Athenians" (4.8.27).

With the situation on the Hellespont now favorable for Athens, Thrasybulus turns to making good on his goal to benefit the Athenians. No doubt bolstered by his successes in Thrace, Thrasybulus proceeds next to Byzantium. (Like Rhodes, Byzantium is a former Athenian colony, whose pre-Athenian democratic regime had been replaced by an oligarchy.) Again, Xenophon provides us with no information as to whether this second leg of Thrasybulus' campaign was part of a pre-orchestrated plan, or, alternatively, whether Byzantium simply came to sight for Thrasybulus as the best place to continue expanding the empire. What we *do* learn is that Thrasybulus, like Alcibiades before him (1.3.8-12), seizes Byzantium with a view to imposing a ten-percent tax on all vessels moving back-and-forth from Pontus (the Black Sea) into the Aegean. Possessing Byzantium constitutes a stable supply of funds for the Athenian military, which, in turn, is necessary for the re-establishment of the empire. Thrasybulus, accordingly, succeeds in possessing Byzantium by replacing its anti-Athenian oligarchy with a pro-Athenian democracy (4.8.27), thereby ensuring a stable supply of tax revenue to Athens from the colony. Xenophon even adds, as if to remind us of Thrasybulus' success as a democratic statesman, that the *demos* at Byzantium was "not displeased (*ouk axtheinōs*) by the presence of many Athenians in the city" (4.8.27). Thrasybulus secures the stability of Byzantium as an Athenian colony, then, by ensuring that the regime in that city is favorably disposed toward the Athenian, democratic way of life.

Having added Byzantium, "as well as Chalcedon" (4.8.28), to the resurgent Athenian empire, Thrasybulus has managed to secure the entire region of northern Asia-

Minor for Athens, this region consisting of the Hellespont,<sup>74</sup> together with the strait that links Pontus and the Aegean (on each side of which stand Byzantium and Chalcedon). As we recall from Chapter Two, this was precisely the region which the Athenians and Spartans disputed at the beginning of the *Hellenica*, and in which the Spartans decisively triumphed over the Athenians at Aegospotami. Thrasybulus' rapid conquest of such an historically disputed region—where the fate of their last empire was decided—perhaps portended to the Athenians a return to their former glory.

Next, from northern Asia Minor, Thrasybulus sets out for the island of Lesbos, location of the former Athenian colony, Mytilene (Thucydides' "Mytilenean Debate," of fame<sup>75</sup>). As Xenophon now relates, the situation at Lesbos, formerly under Athens' sway, is now disadvantageous for the Athenians. Mytilene is the only city in the region that does not actively support the Spartans; accordingly, as a result of Sparta's conquest of the region, each city's formerly Athenian government has been replaced by pro-Spartan oligarchies, or "decarchies." In a situation which reminds us of Thrasybulus' role in the Athenian Civil War, democratic exiles from the surrounding cities of Lesbos have flooded into Mytilene, evidently unwilling or unequipped to recapture their respective cities.

Thrasybulus' strategy here ingeniously combines democratic statesmanship and imperial vision. Having arrived at Mytilene, Thrasybulus delays attacking the Spartan-allied cities, choosing instead to hold a conference involving the three main parties that are to take part in the re-conquest of Lesbos: (1) His own Athenian soldiers, (2) the democratic

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<sup>74</sup> The Hellespont itself consists of Abydos and the Chersonese.

<sup>75</sup> Thucydides 3.36-49.

exiles who had fled to Mytilene, and (3) “the most vigorous” (*errōmenestatous*) of the Mytilenians themselves (4.8.28). While an ordinary military commander might have eschewed enlisting the support of these local powers, preferring instead to rely solely on his own troops,<sup>76</sup> Thrasybulus makes separate promises to each of the most significant military and political groups at Lesbos, promises calculated to gratify each of their characteristic interests. To the “most vigorous” of Mytilene, he promises that they will become the “leaders” (*hupothéis*) of all of Lesbos; to the exiles, that they would be able to return to their cities; and, to his own hoplites, that by bringing over Lesbos to the side of Athens, they will augment the empire’s revenues (4.8.28). Thrasybulus’ strategy pays off: “Having encouraged them and arranged them, he led them against Methymna”—the second largest city of Lesbos, after Mytilene.

Present at Methymna is a Spartan force, headed by Therimachus, whose mission is to bolster the pro-Spartan oligarchies.<sup>77</sup> Of the battle between Thrasybulus and Therimachus that ensued, Xenophon tells us only that Therimachus himself was killed, and his forces, crushed (4.8.29). In the course of a single battle, Sparta’s hegemony in Lesbos thus swiftly comes to an end. In under two years (390-389 BCE), then, Thrasybulus has single handedly restored the empire that Athens once held along the Asian coast—an accomplishment which, in the years to come, Sparta will exert itself to reverse (see, especially, 4.8.31). Accordingly, Sparta’s subsequent attempts to recapture the Asian coast

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<sup>76</sup> One thinks especially of the Spartan general Thibron, who, in his campaign in Asia, refused all political and diplomatic negotiations with the local powers—powers which, having long chafed under the despotism of Pharnabazus and Tissaphernes, would gladly have allied themselves with Thibron (3.1).

<sup>77</sup> These replaced the pro-Athenian democracies.

provoked the Athenians, “fearing lest their [affairs] in the Hellespont, *which Thrasybulus arranged*, would be lost,” to mount a grand defense of their Asian holdings (4.8.31 *my italics*). Thrasybulus’ Hellespont campaign thus impinges on Sparta’s capacity to project hegemonic power. What is more, Thrasybulus’ string of victories no doubt promises a fulfillment of Athens’ imperial hopes. To this end, given what Xenophon showed us of Thrasybulus’ performance in the Athenian Civil War, it is likely that Thrasybulus encouraged his soldiers to believe that their incredible success in Asia was the result of the justice of their cause. Thrasybulus himself, we recall, envisions his campaign as “bringing about some good”—not just for himself and his soldiers, but for *Athens*.

## 8. THE DEATH OF THRASYBULUS AND THE FRAGILITY OF EMPIRE

Thrasybulus’ unexpected death at Aspendos takes on significance in proportion with which his remarkable performances in the Athenian Civil War and in the Hellespont have, in Xenophon’s presentation, heightened our expectations as regards his future success and the success of Athens’ empire. With the Spartans at Lesbos crushed, and the remainder of the Asian coast largely secure for Athens, Thrasybulus chooses now to sail for Rhodes, his original destination.<sup>78</sup> But before doing so, he decides fatefully to make his army “as vigorous as possible” (*hōs errōmenestaton*) by first collecting funds at far-off Aspendos (4.8.30)—a decision which strikes us as strange, considering Thrasybulus originally eschewed his mission to Rhodes on the very grounds that it was strong enough

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<sup>78</sup> See section seven, above.



to hold off the Spartans on its own. Why does Thrasybulus *now* regard it as necessary to strengthen his forces? Moreover, as Strassler notes, it is odd that Thrasybulus elects to sail all the way from Mytilene to Aspendos, what with Rhodos lying roughly halfway between the two cities.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps his battle with Therimachus having left the Athenians depleted, Thrasybulus feels it necessary to prepare himself for all possible contingencies, so as not to be taken off his guard by the Spartans. This seems likely, given that Thrasybulus goes to Aspendos, located in southern Asia-Minor, only after having first “raised money from *other* cities,” as well (4.8.30). Evidently, the money he obtained from cities in the vicinity of Lesbos was, in his view, insufficient.

Having arrived at Aspendos and anchored on the Eurymedon River, on which the city is situated, Thrasybulus succeeds in extracting funds (4.8.30). His voyage would thus seem to be complete. Yet Xenophon here notes that he and his soldiers spend (at least) one night on land, having made a camp somewhere near Aspendos. Perhaps Thrasybulus decided to remain for the night because it was simply too late to set sail for Rhodos once he had finished negotiating with the city’s officials. Nothing in what we have seen so far looks at all out of the ordinary, then, particularly for a man as daring and improvisational as Thrasybulus. Yet Xenophon notes rather perplexingly that some of Thrasybulus’ men “did injustice to the fields” at Aspendos. This, in turn, so enrages the Aspendians that they attack the Athenian camp at night, cutting Thrasybulus down in his bed. Xenophon for his part leaves the timeline of these events rather hazy. Yet we can infer that the Aspendians

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<sup>79</sup> *Landmark*, 170 n4.8.30b.

discovered their wrecked fields sometime after giving Thrasybulus his funds, since, presumably, they would have withheld their funds had the Athenians so enraged them beforehand.

Xenophon comments on Thrasybulus' death with the following laconic summary: "So, even (*kai*) Thrasybulus--indeed, very much (*dē mala*) believed to be a good man (*anēr agathos*)--met his end in this way" (4.8.31). Xenophon's formulation here includes two details which might strike us at first as superfluous; he contrasts Thrasybulus' "seeming goodness" with the wanton, meaningless way in which Thrasybulus meets his end. In so doing, Xenophon forces us to grapple with the fact that "even" a "seemingly good man" like Thrasybulus can come to ruin--not on the battlefield, fighting alongside the gods whom he deemed his allies--but in his bed, at night, in a foreign city.

Xenophon's account of the rise and fall of Thrasybulus thus adds a new layer to his treatment of empire in the *Hellenica*, exposing the unique, impressive qualities possessed by men like Thrasybulus. Yet it also brings to light the *fragility* of empire—and the instability of human affairs, generally—by concentrating on Thrasybulus' meaningless death, and the effect of his death on Athens' pursuit of empire. The successes which Thrasybulus achieves during the Athenian Civil War suggest that he possesses both the power and shrewdness to succeed where Alcibiades failed. What is more, as he himself alleges, his victories at Athens are perhaps the result of divine aid; in this respect, he appears to remedy what the impious Alcibiades got wrong. Both of these hypotheses are undercut, however, by Thrasybulus' dismal, unanticipated failure at Aspendos—in describing which Xenophon reaffirms what he showed through his account of Alcibiades,

namely the unsettling degree to which imperial success, and rule, in general, depend on factors—whether chance, or providential gods, we do not know—whose ways elude our understanding.

## IV. Jason of Pherai

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise and fall of Jason, tyrant of northern-Greek city of Pherai, constitutes the final iteration of Xenophon's treatment of failed empire the *Hellenica*. In two self-styled "digressions,"<sup>80</sup> Xenophon appries us of Jason's ambition to conquer Greece (6.1, 6.4.25)—and then the *world* (6.1.12). For contemporary readers, Jason thus comes to sight as a kind of Alexander the Great who never was.<sup>81</sup> To this end, Xenophon suggests that if any Greek man in the *Hellenica* is in a position to achieve empire on a massive scale—and, in so doing, to succeed where Alcibiades and Thrasybulus failed—it is Jason, "the greatest man of his [time]" (6.4.28). What, then, in Xenophon's view, makes this failed empire-seeker so great? Xenophon helps us answer this question by showing Jason to be particularly aware of the radically contingent character of political affairs; shortly before his own unexpected downfall, Jason proclaims that "the god, it seems, takes joy (*xairei*) in frequently making the great small, and the small, great" (6.4.24). Jason, perhaps the *Hellenica*'s most promising empire-seeker, turns out also to be its most skeptical as regards man's capacity to guarantee political success through the pursuit of empire. And it is this, I argue, in which his greatness largely consists. Jason is aware, albeit to a limited degree, of the fundamental character of political life as Xenophon depicts it in the *Hellenica*: He

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<sup>80</sup> See Strauss, "Greek Historians," 662. Strauss, sticking closer to Xenophon's Greek, calls these digressions "excursions"; the verb Xenophon uses is *ekbainō*, which means, literally, "to walk out of," or, "to walk away from." See also Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, xiv.

<sup>81</sup> Buzzetti, *Xenophon the Socratic Prince* (New York: Palgrave, 2014) 90-91. See also Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 2.7.8-9.

discerns the fragility of human knowledge and human power in the face of “the god,” while attempting to achieve global empire, nevertheless.

## **2. TYRANTS AND GENTLEMEN: XENOPHON’S DRAMATIC INTRODUCTION OF JASON**

Xenophon opens Book Six with a very brief summary of Greek affairs. Thebes, having reunited Boeotia, chooses to invade their former colony of Phocis, which, in turn, appeals to Sparta for aid. With Sparta thus scrambling to uphold the freedom of this previously-free Greek city, Xenophon announces the arrival of one Polydamas of Pharsalus, a magistrate and “gentleman” (*kalos te kagathos* 6.1.1), at Sparta. Reputed to be a reliable advocate (*proxenos*) on behalf of Sparta in Pharsalus, Polydamas reports to the Spartan Assembly a moral-political dilemma in which he currently finds himself.

Recently, Polydamas was approached by Jason, the well-known tyrant of Pherai. Having laid out the immense military and political resources at his disposal, as well as his intentions to subdue all of Greece, and then Persia, Jason presented Polydamas with two alternatives: Either bring the city of Pharsalus over to Jason’s side, or request aid from the Spartans to defend Pharsalus and the freedom of the other cities which he, Jason, intends shortly to conquer. Polydamas, having chosen (for the time being) the latter alternative, thus appears at Sparta, pleading for a military defense against Jason.

Now, strategically, Jason’s diplomatic maneuver here is rather perplexing. For while the opening of his speech to Polydamas strikes a threatening, almost bullying note (see 6.1.5, and, especially, 6.1.7), Jason quickly makes it clear that he wishes to enlist Polydamas as an ally—*so* eager, in fact, that he promises to make Polydamas his second-

in-command, *even if* Polydamas wishes first to appeal to the Spartans for help! In other words, Jason does not simply demand of Polydamas that he join as an accomplice in his campaign. Instead, Jason actually gives Polydamas the option of first appealing to the Spartans, and then, should the Spartans refuse assistance, retroactively joining Jason's imperial enterprise. And, as it turns out, the Spartans *do* refuse assistance; and Polydamas, accordingly, brings over Pharsalus to Jason's side and becomes Jason's lieutenant.

What, then, does Xenophon intend for us to learn about empire-seeking from the fact that Jason, unlike Alcibiades or Thrasybulus, manages to secure his most important goals—acquiring Pharsalus, enlisting Polydamas, and becoming hegemon over all of Thessaly—by shrewd diplomatic maneuvering, as opposed to force? Let us begin by considering the seemingly generous deal with which Jason approaches Polydamas. Had the Spartans heeded Polydamas instead of the Phocians, Jason would have been compelled to fight a united force consisting of Sparta, its allies, and Pharsalus under Polydamas. One obvious possibility Xenophon holds out is that Jason knew Spartan behavior so well, and that he read Greece's current political landscape (in particular, Sparta's involvement in Phocis) so shrewdly and attentively, that he was able, by means of raw political calculation, to anticipate Sparta's refusal to aid Pharsalus.

However, even if Jason did manage to predict Sparta's refusal—and the unpredictability of Greek affairs as Xenophon has depicted them so far causes us to doubt this possibility—his permitting Polydamas to seek Spartan aid was still a gamble. That Jason was willing to take such a gamble in the first place thus forces us to ask why Jason would set such a high price on Polydamas' cooperation. To this end, we do well to consider

the seemingly extraneous features of Xenophon's description of Polydamas. Xenophon begins his introduction of Polydamas by noting that "in the other cities of Thessaly he was so well-reputed (*mala ēudokimei*), and in his own city he was of such repute (*houtōs edokei*) as a gentleman, that (*hōste*) when the Pharsalians were in civil war," they entrusted Polydamas with administering the entire public treasury, which included collecting taxes, paying for "divine things," and seeing that the laws were enforced (6.1.2). In effect, Polydamas was regarded as so trustworthy by his fellow citizens, that two factions within his city which were actually willing to kill each other in civil war were nevertheless willing to invest him with the city's responsibilities. Needless to say, Polydamas' accomplishment was a remarkable one. To have been designated by both sides of a raging civil war as above reproach and worthy of temporary rule, Polydamas must have transcended factionalism and attained statesmanlike public-spiritedness in a surpassingly rare way. Significantly, Xenophon's construction in Greek<sup>82</sup> implies that Polydamas' trustworthiness during the Pharsalian Civil War resulted directly from his being a gentleman; it is as if to say, Polydamas revealed himself as a perfect gentleman by performing the deeds that he did.

It is perhaps for this reason that Xenophon chooses to introduce Polydamas, the only example of a gentleman in the *Hellenica*,<sup>83</sup> in context of the imperial rise of Jason. For Polydamas makes his debut as *the* gentleman of the *Hellenica* as a man faced with a moral-political decision perhaps more difficult than any single decision he would have

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<sup>82</sup> By using an actual result clause, Xenophon implies that Polydamas' being a gentleman is what caused him to act in such a statesmanlike way during the civil war.

<sup>83</sup> The formula *kalos kagathos* is used in only one other place in the *Hellenica*, in Xenophon's account of the Thirty Oligarchs: 2.3-4.

faced during the Pharsalian Civil War. To provoke us into wondering what a gentleman is, Xenophon thus depicts a man reputed to be a gentleman making a decision that will shed light on *why* he is reputed to be a gentleman.

In response to Jason's proposal, Polydamas first insists upon consulting with his close allies, the Spartans: "For people who were friends of the Lacedaemonians to secede and go over to their enemies without having any charge to bring against them—this, I said [to Jason], seemed to me to be impossible" (*aporon* 6.1.13). A more ambitious, self-seeking political man might have seized at the opportunity to become the lieutenant of Jason, "the greatest man of his time" (6.4.28), who is evidently well-positioned to conquer all of Greece. Nevertheless, when the Spartans refuse help, Polydamas does choose to ally his city and himself with Jason. To do otherwise would, presumably, have spelled certain doom for Pharsalus, the city Polydamas strove so hard to serve during its civil war. Accordingly, when Polydamas insisted on speaking to the Spartans, "[Jason] thereupon praised me [Polydamas] and said that he would hold (*ekteon*) me all the more (*mallon*) because I was *that sort of a man*" (*hoti toioutos eiēn* 6.1.13)—namely, a gentleman. Xenophon's emphasis on the theme of gentlemanliness at this particular moment of the *Hellenica* thus prompts us to wonder why Jason, the tyrant, values Polydamas *as a gentleman* so highly.

Another part of what makes Jason so intriguing is Xenophon's superlative characterization of him as "the greatest man of his own time." But what exactly does Xenophon think warrants this characterization, and how does it logically relate to his depiction of Jason's concern with Polydamas the gentleman? The way I propose answering



this question is to examine the unusual synthesis of (Greek) political modes which Jason seeks to achieve, a synthesis of tyrant, empire, and gentleman. Jason's eagerness to incorporate a gentleman such as Polydamas into his imperial project would seem to contradict two basic principles of classical political theory: (1) the traditional enmity between tyrants and aristocrats or gentleman, and (2) the non-imperial character tyrannies, owing to the permanent insecurity of tyrants with respect to their rule over domestic affairs. Xenophon's concentration on this dimension of Jason's imperial project deepens the overall treatment of empire—its advantages as well as its disadvantages—in the *Hellenica*.

As we observed in Chapter Two, above, the tyrant Critias saw fit shortly after assuming power at Athens to kill, systematically, Athens' most public spirited men; and Xenophon notes that he did this because he knew such men would not so easily let themselves be pushed out of the city's affairs. Critias consequently saw fit to clear Athens' political ground of spirited men, so as to make room for himself and the Thirty. Jason, for his part, alludes to this tyrannical strategy in his proposition to Polydamas, arguing that he would much prefer to win him over (*prosagaesthai*) willingly than unwillingly:

If I were to win you by force, you would conspire against me whatever evil (*kakon*) might be in you power; and I would wish to make you as weak as possible. If, on the other hand, I were to *persuade* you to join me, then it is manifest that we would have the power to augment each other. (6.1.7 my italics)

Jason, proceeding next to promise to make Polydamas "the greatest of [men] in Greece" after himself (6.1.8), thus holds out the possibility that he and the gentleman, Polydamas, might very well serve each other's interests by making each other better. The possibility is a tempting one for Jason no doubt in part because the alternatives are so unattractive.

Killing or exiling Polydamas would cause Jason to lose favor not only with Polydamas' countrymen, the Pharsalians, but also with many of the Thessalians (cf. 6.1.5 with 6.1.2), whom he, Jason, seeks to unite, train, and rule over as *tagos* or chieftain (6.1.8-9), before leading them against all of Greece (6.1.9). What is more, seizing Pharsalus without Polydamas' cooperation, and then leaving Polydamas in power, would (as Jason himself points out) pose a grave problem to his own tyrannical rule, just as Athens' spirited gentlemen posed a threat to Critias and the Thirty. For as a gentleman who cares for justice in his city, Polydamas would probably reject Jason's tyrannical rule over Pharsalus, and consequently, work to undermine it. Yet Xenophon also makes it clear that Jason has more than enough military and political power to overcome these obstacles; Polydamas himself says so (6.1.6).

This fact, together with Jason's emphatic, seemingly earnest proposal to Polydamas, suggest that Jason sees in securing Polydamas' cooperation, not just the easiest of three alternatives, but rather, a potential *positive* benefit to his imperial project. Should Jason persuade Polydamas willingly to join his imperial project, it is hard to imagine a more useful counselor of state. Not only has Polydamas proved himself manifestly competent in managing political affairs by serving as magistrate during the Pharsalian Civil War; he has also proved himself a surpassingly trustworthy ally. For, in addition to maintaining the trust of the warring factions of Pharsalus, Polydamas did his best (as Xenophon make clear by giving him the first speech of Book Six) to persuade his allies, the Spartans, that Jason poses a massive threat, not only to them, but to all of Greece. In effect, we might say, Polydamas' initial reluctance to join Jason's campaign, on account of

his agreement with the Spartans, only serves to confirm his value as a potential ally of Jason.

This sword cuts both ways, however. Polydamas' seriousness as a gentleman could pose a problem for the aspiring tyrant, Jason, whose rise to power in Greece would surely call for promise-breaking, machinations, and all manner of dirty tricks. Should the gentleman Polydamas be unwilling to authorize or support such dirty tricks, one wonders how Jason might react. Xenophon himself provides a possible answer in his depiction of Theramenes (counselor) and Critias (tyrant). Should Polydamas oppose Jason's bloodthirsty machinations, would we witness at Jason's court a replay of Critias' execution of the (relatively) principled Theramenes?

### **3. JASON THE IMPERIAL TYRANT**

Another important aspect of Jason's character as an empire-seeker is his recognition of the indispensability of discipline, continence, restraint, and hard work for the acquisition of empire. In his speech to the Spartans, Polydamas declares that war with Jason would pit Sparta against "powerful forces and a man who is so prudent as a general that whatever he sets out to obtain, whether by stealth, by foresight, or by force, he does not fail to obtain." The cause of Jason's success, elaborates Polydamas, is the effect that his rule has on the men under him:

He has made his men just like himself. At the same time, he knows how to make his men obtain what they desire whenever they have done something really good through hard work, with the result that his men have learned that through their hard labor will come pleasures, as well. Moreover, of all the men I know, he is the one most able to control the desires of his body, so that he is not hindered by such things

in doing what must be done. (6.1.15-16)

To this end, Jason himself announces that in his own army there exists not a single man who can match him in his capacity for “hard work” (*ponein*)—a boast Polydamas confirms by asserting that Jason is a “lover of hard work” (*philoponos* 6.1.5-6).<sup>84</sup> But to what end, we wonder, does Jason direct his and his men’s hard work? Xenophon answers our question by spotlighting Jason’s desire to impose his own qualities of soul on the peoples and nations whom he conquers. Consider, for example, Jason’s remarks respecting the current status of the Thessalians: “Looking at their bodies and their greatness of soul (*megalopsuxia*), I think that if someone treated them nobly, the Thessalians would not think it worthy of themselves to be ruled (*hupekooi*) by any other people” (6.1.9). Jason envisions a change that must take place not just in the current political situation in Thessaly, namely his becoming *tagos* or chieftain. Additionally, and more deeply, he discerns in the Thessalians a latent though hitherto undeveloped potential to achieve the qualities of soul necessary to be a *ruling*, rather than *ruled*, people. These qualities, as he makes clear, coalesce around the self-respect a people has for itself. Evidently, the Thessalians in their current condition lack what it takes to hold themselves worthy of refusing to submit blindly to despotic rule. Jason, we might say, seeks to make the Thessalians capable of freedom. Or, to put it slightly differently, Jason seeks not merely to conquer other nations, but to transform them into men fit to undertake daring, serious, enterprising tasks—something Polydamas alluded to

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<sup>84</sup> For those familiar with Xenophon’s two most impressive characters, Socrates and Cyrus, it is hard to imagine Xenophon bestowing higher praise on a leader than his praise of Jason here. Both Cyrus and Socrates, notwithstanding their manifold differences, exhibit many of the qualities of soul possessed by Jason—continence, or disciplined self-control in the face of pleasures, in particular.

in saying that Jason “makes his men just like himself.”

In this respect, Jason differs most decisively from the Critias, the other prominent tyrant we encounter in the *Hellenica*. Whereas Jason seeks to form the passions of self-respect and self-rule in the souls of the Thessalians, Critias undertakes (unsuccessfully) to transform a people that already holds itself to be free into a people willing to submit to despotic tyranny under the Thirty. Accordingly, Critias sought to stamp out Athens’ most spirited men (such as Thrasybulus), who, as such, were likely to resist the Thirty’s rule and to seek to restore the freedom of the *demos*.<sup>85</sup> Jason, by contrast, seeks to appropriate to his own project the serious and public spirited gentleman, Polydamas, as well as to elevate the men he seeks to rule from the status of slaves to the status of free men.

How does Jason’s desire to transform slavish men into ambitious ones fit in to his envisioned conquest of Greece and then the world? In a statement that reminds us of Alcibiades’ desire to appropriate the “infinite” wealth of Persia for his own, by extension, Athens’ use, Jason contends:

You know, of course, that the King of Persia is the wealthiest of men because he receives tribute not from the islands but from the mainland. Despite that, I think we could make even the King of Persia subject to us more easily than we could Greece, for I know that all men there have trained for slavery rather than for bravery (*alkēn*), and I know how the King was driven to extremes by the forces both of those who went on the *Anabasis of Cyrus* (*anabasēs hurou*) and those who marched with Agesilaus. (6.1.12 my italics)

The thrust of Jason’s remark here, if we take it together with his remarks concerning the possibility of raising the Thessaly from slaves to free men, is that he, Jason, has learned

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<sup>85</sup> Theramenes explicitly warns this in regards both to Alcibiades and to Thrasybulus; see Chapter Three, above.

the importance of Greek freedom and bravery from the example set—by none other than Xenophon! Reports of the havoc reaped by the Ten-Thousand in Persia—perhaps including Xenophon’s own book, the *Anabasis*—have confirmed in Jason’s mind the superiority of Greeks to Persians in respect to discipline, courage, and military virtue, in general. The lesson Jason derives from Xenophon’s *Anabasis* is that a Greek empire-seeker capable of modeling himself after Xenophon might subdue the entire Persian empire. Part of what makes Jason “the greatest man of his time” must be that Jason grasped what Xenophon himself saw in Greece’s relationship with Persia. To repeat Xenophon’s exhortation of the Greeks in the *Anabasis*, which we noted in Chapter Two, above:

It seems to me to be equitable (*eikos*) and just that we first attempt to reach Greece and our comrades (*tous oikeious*) and point out (*epideixai*) to the Greeks that they voluntarily live in poverty (*hekontes penontai*), and that they could now bring here [Persia] those who are living as citizens with difficulty (*sklērōs politeuontas*) and see them being provided for richly. For, men, it is manifest that all these good things belong to those who are most capable. (3.2.26)

As we recall from Chapter Two, Xenophon indicates through his juxtaposition of the Persians—possessing infinite monies—and Alcibiades—possessing *no* money—a glaring disparity between those with supplies who are unable to use them, and those without supplies who nevertheless *could* use them, if adequately supplied. And for a time, it seems as though Alcibiades might be the Greek most capable of remedying this disparity, to which Xenophon so explicitly draws our attention in the above-quoted passage of the *Anabasis*. Accordingly, in Book Six—a full thirty-one years after Alcibiades’ defeat at Notium—it is Jason whom Xenophon depicts as possessing the clearest grasp of the imperial possibilities that lie before Greece.

#### 4. JASON'S SUDDEN DOWNFALL

Despite his overwhelming prudence, justice, inherited political power, and good fortune, Jason, like Alcibiades and Thrasybulus, comes to a shocking, untimely, and ignominious end, at the hands of seven brigands who “later received honors in many of the Greek cities” (6.4.32). As a result, Xenophon indicates, the political chaos that unfolded in Pherai as a result of Jason’s death ensured that, at least in the foreseeable future, no ruler in Pherai would be able to pick up Jason’s torch where he dropped it, so as to continue the imperial project Jason began (6.4.33-37).

Now, as we have seen so far, Xenophon builds up Jason’s anticipated imperial project in a way similar to that in which he drew us into the affairs of Alcibiades and Thrasybulus. Consequently, Jason’s sudden fall from power, like that of the former two, takes us by surprise, and fills us with considerable disappointment. Yet Xenophon here, too, introduces the question of whether the god(s) played a role in Jason’s downfall. Before beginning his brief account of Jason’s fall (6.4.31-32), Xenophon notes that Jason destroyed a certain wall at Herakleia which stood between Pherai and the rest of Greece. He did this, Xenophon states, “because he believed that by destroying Herakleia, which sits on a narrow piece of ground, he could not be prevented by anyone else from marching back into Greece whenever he wished to do so” (6.4.27). Why Jason might wish to march quickly into Greece sometime in the future, Xenophon has, of course, made clear enough in his description of Jason’s meeting with Polydamas.

It is thus in the immediate wake of this allusion to Jason’s anticipated invasion of

Greece that Xenophon suddenly describes Jason's death. In 370 BCE, we learn, Jason initiated preparations for the Pythian festival at Delphi by commanding "the cities" to contribute victims for the common sacrifices. In addition, Jason announces that a prize would be given to whoever donated the finest bull (6.4.29). Neither of these observations are particularly out of keeping with what we might expect from an ambitious Greek leader, eager to take his place at the Delphic Festival among the established Greek powers. What Xenophon notes next, however, introduces a complication. Jason also ordered the Thessalians (over all of whom he ruled, at this time) to be prepared for battle at the time of the Pythia, because

as they say (*hōs ephasan*), he intended to establish himself as the leader in the god's honor (*panegurin tō theō*) and of the contests. However, regarding the sacred monies (*tōn hierōn chrematōn*), whatever he intended is, even now, still unclear; but it is said that when the Delphians asked what they should do (*poiein*), if he should take the god's monies (*tōn toū theoū chrematōn*), the god replied that he would take care of it by himself. (6.4.31)

By twice qualifying this statement as a report ("as they say," "it is said"), Xenophon causes us to suspect its veracity. More precisely, he causes us to question both why Jason prepared the Thessalians for battle, as well as whether Apollo in fact replied as they Delphians claim. Are the events that follow, we accordingly wonder, part of Apollo's providence? Or, alternatively, does Xenophon regard the report that Apollo would "take care of things himself" as hearsay?

Regardless, in the passage that follows, Xenophon briefly describes Jason's unexpected slaying by three impetuous young men. On this score, Xenophon further draws out our surprise, and perhaps our disappointment, by prefacing his account of Jason's death



with these words:

And so, the real man (*ho anēr*), so young (*tēlikoūtos*)<sup>86</sup> and having contrived so many and so grand of things (*tosaūta kai toiaūta dianoooumenos*)...was approached by seven young men (*neaniskōn*) who, acting as if they had some difference with each other, cut his throat and killed him. (6.4.31)

With three intensifiers—so young, so many and so grand of thing—Xenophon contrasts Jason’s superlative qualities as an aspiring imperialist, on the one hand, and the shocking pettiness of his death, on the other. Is there not a disproportion, we wonder, between the abilities of this “greatest man of his time” and the circumstances of his death? True, by prefacing his account of Jason’s death with a mention of Apollo’s providence, Xenophon at least holds out the possibility that Jason’s murderers were acting out the god’s intentions; this is the first possibility we sketched out above. However, by characterizing the three responsible for his death as impetuous young men,<sup>87</sup> Xenophon would seem to emphasize the fortuitous character of Jason’s downfall. Jason, the forward-looking imperial visionary, is cut down as a result of a spirited outburst on the part of ambitious youths. This understanding of his death fits with the second alternative we mentioned above, namely that Jason’s fanatical murderers were inspired in part by the unsubstantiated report that Jason, an aspiring tyrant over all of Greece, intended to seize “the sacred monies” by force. By this account, then, Jason’s death was the result not of Apollo providentially taking care of things himself, but rather, of hot-headed young Greeks fearful of Jason’s growing tyrannical and imperial power. To this end, Xenophon adds at the end of his account that

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<sup>86</sup> This unusual word, Homeric in usage (Liddell and Scott, 805), Xenophon uses only once more in the *Hellenica*, in explaining the elderly Agesilaus’ reasons for refusing to lead the Spartan army: “others of such an age (*tēlikoūtos*) were not required to serve” (5.4.13).

<sup>87</sup> Regarding Xenophon’s use of *neoniskos*, see Buzzetti, *Socratic Prince*, 94 n 33.

“by this [event], it became clear that the Greeks feared powerfully lest [Jason] become tyrant” (6.4.32).

As in his account of Alcibiades’ downfall, Xenophon in describing Jason’s death leaves us wondering whether—and if so, *how*—we could ascertain which of these two alternative accounts is the true one. The claims which Xenophon reports suggest that Jason came to ruin through divine justice; Jason transgressed divine law by attempting to seize Apollo’s treasure, and was fittingly punished. If this were true in Xenophon’s view, then the lesson of his account of Jason would seem to be that tyrants and empire-seekers invariably incur the wrath of the gods. If, however, Xenophon doubts the claims which he reports, then the cause of Jason’s premature downfall would, in Xenophon’s view, be natural or human, rather than divine, in origin.

Nevertheless, as in the case of Alcibiades’ ruin, as well as Thrasybulus’, there is no *obvious* mistake we can point to in Jason’s actions which led to his death. Indeed, considering the number of daring, dangerous feats that Jason had successfully undertaken—in the course of any of which he might have been killed—before his death, it is by no means obvious why his conduct preceding the Pythian Games, and not, say, his intervention in Thebes’ invasion of Sparta (6.4.21-22), resulted in his downfall. Accordingly, the difficulty of pinpointing the cause of Jason’s downfall as Xenophon describes it causes us, in turn, to question with what certainty we can maintain that the cause of Jason’s downfall was of natural, and not *divine*, origin. And if we are unable to maintain this position with certainty, then, Xenophon provokes us to wonder, precisely what grounds do we have for denying the veracity of those claims (which Xenophon takes

care to report) regarding the role played by the gods in Greek affairs?

It is in light of this question that Jason's peculiar wisdom comes to sight—namely, his wisdom concerning the role he believes “the god” plays, in making the small great, and the great, small. Unlike Jason, neither Alcibiades nor Thrasybulus explicitly draw attention to the fragility of human affairs generally, and, *a fortiori*, to the fragility of their own imperial ambitions. Jason's speech thus accords with his deeds—or rather, with his *fate*—in a way that the speeches of Alcibiades and Thrasybulus do not. This is intriguing, since, as we have seen, it is also Jason who seems to have grasped most firmly an important part of Xenophon's own teaching on empire in the *Anabasis*, namely that the contentious, ambitious Greeks should turn their sights away from Greek in-fighting toward Persia, which is exposed in the *Anabasis* as ripe for the taking.

## V. Conclusion

Jason achieves a partial insight into the understanding of empire which Xenophon himself evinces through his depiction of failed imperialists in the *Hellenica*. The outlines of this understanding, which I have attempted to bring to light in this study, we might summarize as follows. By spotlighting political failure—indeed, the failure of precisely those empire-seekers whom we most expect to succeed—Xenophon compels readers of the *Hellenica* to meditate on the role of chance in politics, and in human affairs, generally. One of the rhetorical goals that Xenophon seeks to achieve through his treatment of empire in the *Hellenica* would therefore seem to be to shake his readers' confidence in the capacity of humankind to take matters into their own hands, so to speak, and thereby radically to ameliorate their fundamental situation by means of politics, *without* the help of God or gods. In this respect, the *Hellenica* differs from the account of politics and human power advanced by modern political philosophers following Machiavelli, as well as from the account advanced by Xenophon himself in the *Education of Cyrus*. By tempering—not to say, *discouraging*—our hopes as regards our ability to achieve political goods by human means alone, Xenophon induces us to think through the principles underlying Machiavelli's teaching on chance.<sup>88</sup> By the same token, Xenophon casts some doubt on his own presentation of the “science of empire” in his *Education of Cyrus*. In that text, Cyrus the Great claims that the gods fight on his side as allies, and then achieves precisely the imperial goal he originally sets out to achieve. Thrasybulus in the *Hellenica*, by contrast—

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<sup>88</sup> See e.g., Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter Fifteen.

who Xenophon shows making the very same claim regarding the gods—comes to ruin shortly after embarking on his own imperial venture. Did the gods who fought alongside the empire-seeker, Cyrus, abandon the empire-seeker Thrasybulus? Or does Thrasybulus' premature downfall in the *Hellenica* cast doubt on the compatibility of imperialism and piety, which the *Education* seems to affirm?

Empire brings apparent order and intelligibility to politics, while severely limiting freedom. Accordingly, “confusion and disorder” in political things would seem to be the price that Greece must pay for the absence of empire. The first of these points Xenophon makes clearest in the *Education of Cyrus*. Yet, as we shall see, it also becomes clear in Xenophon's treatments of empire in the *Hellenica*. Here, the moments of greatest intelligibility are those in which Xenophon draws our attention to a single, determined, ambitious man, whose pursuit of empire we can follow. That the *Education* is substantially fictitious is therefore in this respect crucial. The *Education*, an historical novel, emphasizes the strength of Cyrus' “science of empire”; as Xenophon at least suggests in the first chapter of the work, Cyrus' astonishing success in empire is a direct result of, it flows directly from, his science or knowledge of rule. Consequently, we feel confident (to put it rather crudely) that we can show that Cyrus *had* to succeed. By contrast, the *Hellenica* concentrates on the degree to which success and failure in empire depend on factors we cannot know; Xenophon “intimates that things do not always turn out as people expect them to.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Higgins, *Xenophon*, 103.

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